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NOVEMBER 1957

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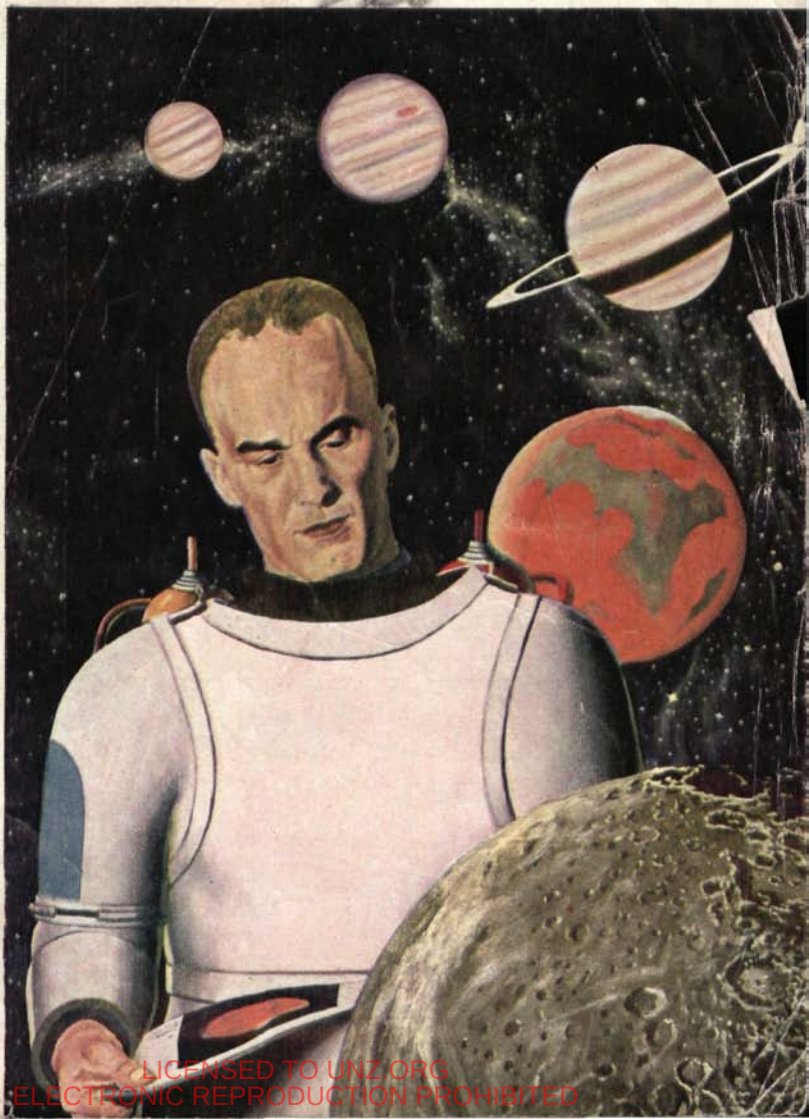

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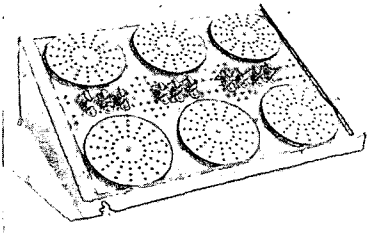

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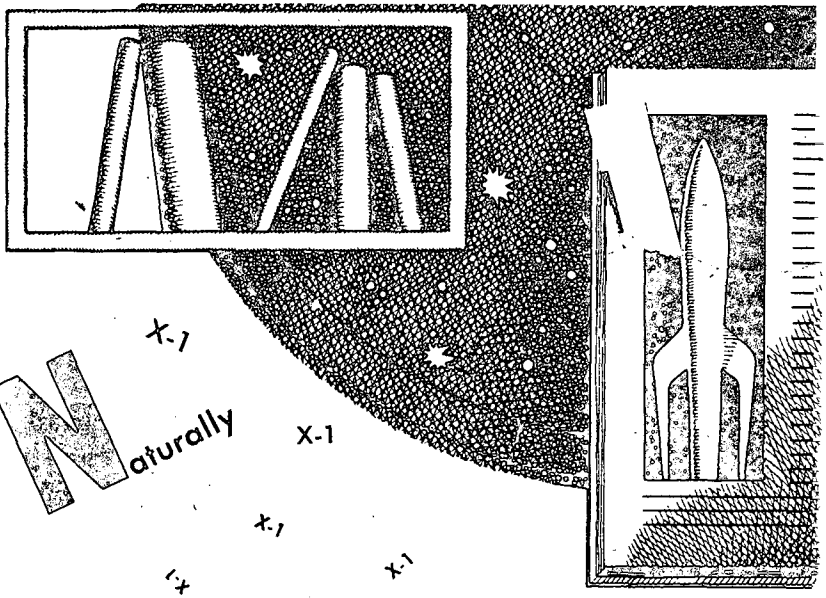

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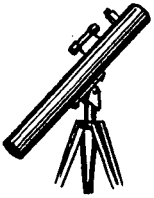

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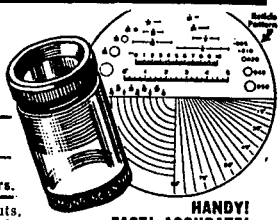

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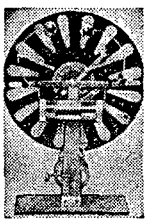

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NOVEMBER, 1957 VOL. 15, NO. 1

Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

ALL ORIGINAL STORIES • NO REPRINTS!

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GALAXY *Science Fiction* is published monthly by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Main offices: 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y. 35c per copy. Subscription: (12 copies) $3.50 per year in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions. Elsewhere $4.50. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Copyright, New York 1957, by Galaxy Publishing Corporation, Robert M. Guinn, president. All rights, including translations reserved. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction, and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental.

Printed in the U.S.A. by The Guinn Co., Inc., N. Y. 14, N. Y. Title Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

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CALL TO ARMS

P SCHUYLER Miller, book-reviewer and author, recently fired this (abridged) broadside letter:

"I want a crusade.

"I'm basing this call on two axioms and an opinion:

"A. Unless science fiction magazines are published, we can't sell to them.

"B. Unless the magazines are sold, they won't be published.

"C. From where I sit, the distributors are not even trying to sell the three top-flight magazines, and the same is increasingly true of all the rest.

"None of this makes any kind of sense to me, economically. I don't know how distributors make a living if they don't bother to distribute. If you ask the distributors why they don't put the new magazines on sale, they'll blandly deny that they don't.

"The only answer is some systematic fact-finding so we'll have some concrete data for the publishers."

Miller then reports in detail the results of some strolling around town trying to buy his favorite magazines. As a reader, he was frustrated and angered. As a writer, he was appalled by a degree of inefficiency that in any other business would be rewarded by thoroughly deserved bankruptcy.

In case you're puzzled by the setup, or wonder why publishers seem to tolerate an intolerable situation, here's the way it works:

Very few publishers have distribution departments. (Because of the cost of road crews to cover almost 100,000 stands, even the biggest have to spread expenses by distributing for other houses.) Self-distributing or distributing through someone else, it makes little difference—the number of echelons resembles terraced mountain rice-paddies.

The distributors work through wholesalers, who cover territories either on their own or through smaller local wholesalers; the wholesalers have salesmen and/or truck drivers who double as salesmen; and so forth down the line to the newsstand owner, who can make a good thing of carrying

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magazines by having attractive displays, noting which ones the customers want, or the opposite, considering the whole thing a nuisance accommodation.

Miller gives an example of this kind of myopia by quoting a bookstore/card shop owner as saying that "no downtown store can afford to waste shelf room on magazines because the margin is so small." The margin is actually a very handsome one, especially if you consider that the whole operation is on a consignment basis—the dealer pays only for copies sold. And unless this gent has a phenomenal business, I'd bet that many city stores, by doing a real job with their stock, net more on magazine sales alone than he grosses on all he carries.

Miller says he heard from a wholesaler that "it cost them less in bookkeeping to put all the copies they got of a given issue in one or two places, instead of trying to distribute to all outlets." The wholesaler also admitted that, when they were rushed, they would distribute the total shipment in one town and not bother to bring any to the next town at all.

"Somewhere, the economics of the situation have gone screwy. The proprietors who do care what they get, and what their regular customers want, get no satisfaction from the wholesaler. I can't understand the logic of what is happening. When I can't get *Astounding, Galaxy* and *F&SF*, month after month, something is very wrong."

And so Miller calls for a crusade of readers and writers to clean up the distribution mess. It was bad enough when he issued his proclamation. It's worse now as a result of American News Company's — no, you can't say demise. For generations, this mindless behemoth dominated magazine distribution by sheer bulk alone; like the dinosaurs, rather than dying, it became extinct. In the long run, this will be a boon—distribution is bound to get more active, intelligent and alert.

But that long run may prove too long for publishers of science fiction, without the help of readers and writers.

What does a letter like Miller's accomplish? We turned it over to our distributor — and enough copies of GALAXY are being sent into the area to insure that nobody will have to hunt for one.

With your help, the same could be true of your town. And you would, at the same time, enable us to go on publishing top-level material, which we couldn't afford if sales went down. We want to know how we are doing where you live—but we'll also pass on information relating to other magazines.

—H. L. GOLD

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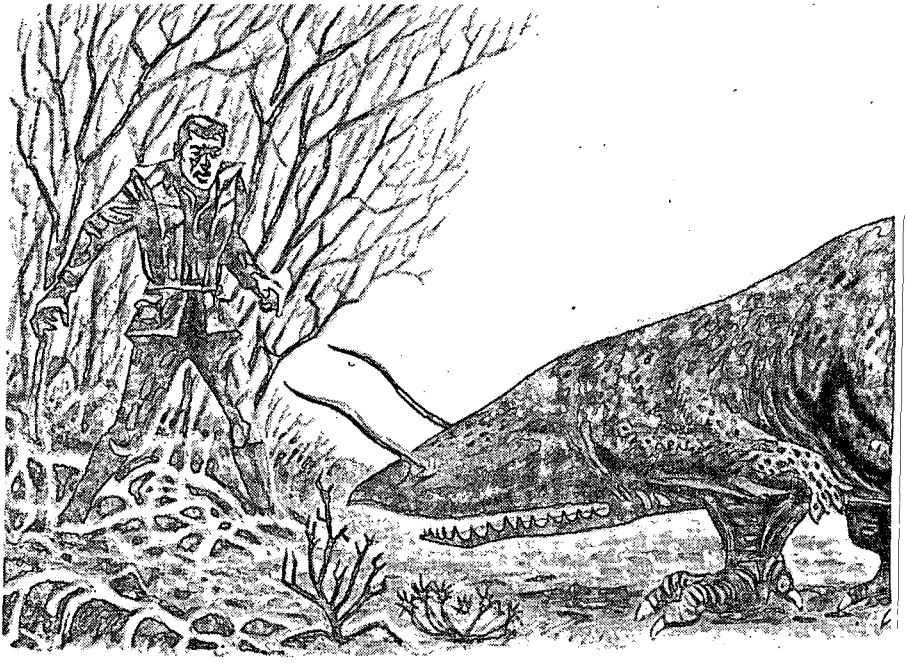
Morning After

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

Illustrated by BOWMAN



SLOWLY and unwillingly, Piersen recovered consciousness. He lay on his back, eyes tightly closed, trying to postpone the inevitable awakening. But consciousness returned and brought sensation with it. Needles of pain stabbed at his eyeballs and the base of his skull began to pound like a giant heart. His joints seemed to be on fire and his stomach was a deep well of nausea.

It was no relief for him to

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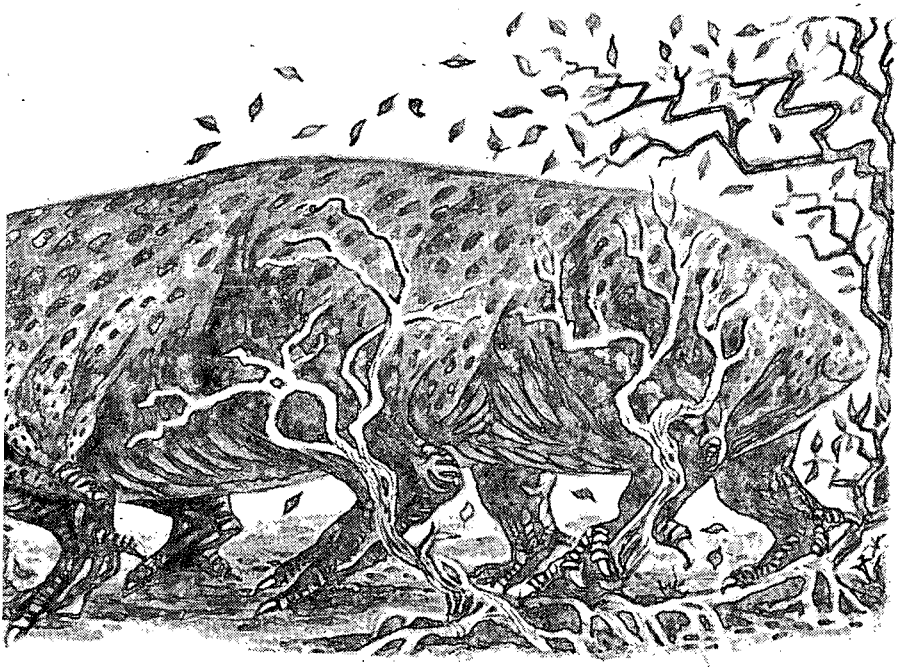
What was he doing here? Would he live or die?

For the answers to these and other questions,

Piersen had to keep tuning in on a hangover!



realize that he was suffering from the absolute king and emperor of all hangovers.

Piersen had considerable knowledge of hangovers. He had experienced most of them in his time—the alcohol jitters, the miniscarette depressions, the triple skliti nerve ache. But this hangover felt like a combination and intensification of them all, with heroin withdrawal symptoms thrown in for good measure.

What had he been drinking

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last night? And where? He tried to remember, but last night, like so many nights in his life, was a featureless blur. He would have to reconstruct it, as usual, piece by piece.

Well, he decided, it was time to do the manly thing. Time to open his eyes, get out of bed and walk bravely to the medicine chest. A hypo of di-chloral right down the main line ought to bring him around.

PIERSEN opened his eyes and started to get out of bed. Then he realized that he wasn't in bed.

He was lying in tall grass, with a glaring white sky overhead and the odor of decaying vegetation in his nostrils.

He groaned and closed his eyes again. This was too much. He must have been *really* boiled last night, potted, fried, roasted and done to a turn. Hadn't even made it home. Apparently he had passed out in Central Park. Now he'd have to hail a flit and hold himself together until he could reach his apartment.

With a mighty effort, he opened his eyes and stood up.

He was standing in tall grass. Surrounding him, as far as he could see, were giant orange-boled trees. The trees were interlaced with purple and green vines, some as thick as his body. Around the trees, impenetrably dense, was a riotous jungle of ferns, shrubs, evil yellow orchids, black creepers, and many unidentifiable plants of ominous shape and hue. Through this dense jungle, he could hear the chitter and squeak of small animals and a distant grating roar from some larger beast.

"This is not Central Park," Piersen informed himself.

He looked around, shielding his eyes from the glaring sunless sky.

"I don't even think it's Earth," he said.

He was astonished and delighted with his calmness. Gravely, he sat down in the tall grass and proceeded to review his situation.

His name was Walter Hill Piersen. He was 32 years old, a resident of New York City. He was a fully accredited voter, respectably unemployed, moderately well off. Last night, he had left his apartment at seven-fifteen, with the intention of partying. It must have been quite an evening.

Yes, quite an evening, Piersen told himself. At some time during it, he seemed to have blacked out. But instead of coming to in bed, or even in Central Park, he had awakened in a thick and smelly jungle. Furthermore, he felt certain that this jungle was not on Earth.

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That summed it up rather well, Piersen told himself. He looked around at the vast orange trees, the purple and green vines which interwove them, the harsh white sunlight streaming through. And, finally, the reality of it all filtered through his befogged mind.

He shrieked in terror, buried his head in his arms and passed out.

THE next time he recovered consciousness, most of his hangover had gone, leaving behind only a taste in his mouth and a general state of debility. Then and there, Piersen decided it was time he went on the wagon – past time, when he started having hallucinations about orange-colored trees and purple vines in an alien jungle.

Cold sober now, he opened his eyes and saw that he was in an alien jungle.

"All right!" he shouted. "What's this all about?"

There was no immediate answer. Then, from the surrounding trees, a vast chattering of unseen animal life began, and slowly subsided.

Shakily, Piersen stood up and leaned against a tree. He had reacted all he could to the situation; there was no more astonishment left in him. So he was in a jungle. All right—then what was he doing there?

No answer sprang to mind. Obviously, he told himself, something unusual must have happened last night. But what? Painfully, he tried to reconstruct the events of the evening.

He had left his apartment at seven-fifteen and gone to . . .

He whirled. Something was coming toward him, moving softly through the underbrush. Piersen waited, his heart hammering. It came nearer, moving cautiously, sniffing and moaning faintly. Then the underbrush parted and the creature came out into the open.

It was about ten feet long, a streamlined blue-black animal shaped like a torpedo or a shark, moving toward him on four sets of thick, stubby legs. It seemed to have no external eyes or ears, but long antennae vibrated from its sloping forehead. When it opened its long, undershot jaw, Piersen saw rows of yellow teeth.

Moaning softly to itself, the creature advanced upon him.

Although he had never seen nor dreamed of a beast like this, Piersen didn't pause to question its validity. He turned and sprinted into the jungle. For fifteen minutes, he raced through the underbrush. Then, completely winded, he was forced to stop.

Far behind him, he could hear the blue-black creature moaning as it followed.

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Piersen started again, walking now. Judging by the creature's moans, it couldn't move very rapidly. He was able to maintain his distance at a walk. But what would happen when he stopped? What were its intentions toward him? And could it climb trees?

He decided not to think about it at present.

The first question, the key to all other questions, was: *What was he doing here? What happened to him last night?*

He concentrated.

HE had left his apartment at seven-fifteen and gone for a walk. The New York climatologist had, by popular demand, produced a pleasant misty evening with a fertile hint of rain, which, of course, would never fall on the city proper. It made for pleasant walking.

He strolled down Fifth Avenue, window shopping, and making note of the Free Days offered by the stores. Baimler's Department Store, he noticed, was having a Free Day next Wednesday, from six to nine A.M. He really should get a special pass from his alderman. Even with it, he would have to wake up early and stand in the preferential line. But it was better than paying.

In half an hour, he was comfortably hungry. There were several good commercial restaurants nearby, but he seemed to be without funds. So he turned down 54th Street, to the Coutray Free Restaurant.

At the door, he showed his voting card and his special pass, signed by Coutray's third assistant secretary, and was allowed in. He ordered a plain filet mignon dinner and drank a mild red wine with it, since no stronger beverages were served there. His waiter brought him the evening newspaper. Piersen scanned the listings for free entertainment, but found nothing to his liking.

As he was leaving, the manager of the restaurant hurried up to him.

"Beg pardon, sir," the manager said. "Was everything satisfactory, sir?"

"The service was slow," said Piersen. "The filet, although edible, was not of truly prime quality. The wine was passable."

"Yes, sir—thank you, sir—our apologies, sir," the manager said, jotting down Piersen's comments in a little notebook. "We'll try to improve, sir. Your dinner came to you courtesy of the Honorable Blake Coutray, Water Commissioner for New York. Mr. Coutray is standing for re-election on November 22. Row J-3 in your voting booth. We humbly solicit your vote, sir."

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"We'll see," said Piersen, and left the restaurant.

In the street, he helped himself to a souvenir pack of cigarettes which a record-playing dispensing machine was distributing for Elmer Baine, a minor Brooklyn politician. He strolled again along Fifth Avenue, thinking about Blake Coutray.

LIKE any accredited citizen, Piersen valued his vote highly and bestowed it only after mature consideration. He, like all voters, considered a candidate's qualifications carefully before voting for or against him.

In Coutray's favor was the fact that he had maintained a good restaurant for nearly a year. But what *else* had he done? Where was that free amusement center he had promised, and the jazz concerts?

Shortage of public funds was not a valid excuse.

Would a new man do more? Or should Coutray be given another term? These were not questions to be decided out of hand, Piersen thought. And now was not the time for serious thinking. Nights were made for pleasure, intoxication, laughter.

What should he do this evening? He had seen most of the free shows. Sporting events didn't interest him particularly. There were several parties going, but they didn't sound very amusing. He could find available girls at the Mayor's Open House, but Piersen's appetites had been waning of late.

So he could get drunk, which was the surest escape from an evening's boredom. What would it be? Miniscarette? A contact intoxicant? Skliti?

"Hey, Walt!"

He turned. Billie Benz was walking toward him, grinning broadly, half roasted already.

"Hey, there, Walt boy!" Benz said. "You got anything on tonight?"

"Nothing much," Piersen asked. "Why?"

"A new kick's opening. Fine, brilliant, lively new kick. Care to try?"

Piersen frowned. He didn't like Benz. The big, loud, red-faced man was a thoroughgoing shirker, a completely worthless human. The fact that he held no job didn't bother Piersen. Hardly anyone worked any more. Why work if you can vote? But Benz was too lazy even to vote. And that, Piersen felt, was too much. Voting was the obligation and livelihood of every citizen.

Still, Benz had an uncanny knack for finding new kicks before anyone else.

Piersen hesitated, then asked, "Is it free?"

"Freer than soup," Benz said,

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unoriginal as always.

"What's it all about?"

"Well, friend, come along and let me tell you . . ."

PIERSEN mopped perspiration from his face. The jungle had become deathly still. He could no longer hear the blue-black animal moaning in the underbrush behind him. Perhaps it had given up the chase.

His evening clothes were ripped to shreds. Piersen stripped off the jacket and unbuttoned his shirt to the waist. The sun, hidden somewhere behind the dead-white sky, glared down. He was drenched in perspiration and his throat was parched. He would have to have water soon.

His situation was becoming perilous. But Piersen refused to think about it now. He had to know why he was here before he could plan a way out.

What fine, brilliant new kick had he gone to with Billie Benz?

He leaned against a tree and shut his eyes. Slowly the memory began to form in his mind. They had walked east on 62nd Street and then—

He heard the underbrush tremble and looked up quickly. The blue-black creature crept silently out. Its long antennae quivered, then homed on him. Instantly the creature gathered itself and sprang.

Reacting instinctively, Piersen jumped out of the way. The creature, claws extended, missed him, whirled and leaped again. Off balance, Piersen couldn't dodge in time. He threw out both arms and the shark-shaped animal crashed into him.

The impact slammed Piersen against a tree. Desperately, he clung to the beast's broad throat, straining to keep the snapping jaws from his face. He tightened his grip, trying to choke it, but there wasn't enough strength in his fingers.

The creature twisted and writhed, its paws clawing up the ground. Piersen's arms began to bend under the strain. The snapping jaws came within an inch of his face. A long black-specked tongue licked out—

In sheer revulsion, Piersen hurled the moaning creature from him. Before it could recover, he seized two vines and pulled himself into a tree. Driven by sheer panic, he scrambled up the slippery trunk from branch to branch. Thirty feet above the ground, he looked down.

The blue-black thing was coming up after him, climbing as though trees were its natural habitat.

Piersen went on, his whole body beginning to shake from the strain. The trunk was thinning out now and there were only a

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few branches left to which he could cling. As he approached the top, fifty feet above the ground, the whole tree began to sway beneath his weight.

He looked down and saw the creature ten feet below him and still coming. Piersen groaned, afraid he could climb no further. But fright put strength into his body. He scrambled to the last large branch, took a firm grip and drew back both legs. As the beast approached, he lashed out with both feet.

He caught it full in the body. Its claws tore out of the bark with a loud rasping sound. The creature fell, screaming, crashing through the overhanging branches, and finally hitting the ground with a squashy thud.

Then there was silence.

The creature was probably dead, Piersen thought. But he was not going down to investigate. No power on Earth—or any other planet in the Galaxy—would induce him to descend willingly from his tree. He was going to stay right where he was until he was damned good and ready to come down.

He slid down a few feet until he came to a large forked branch. Here he was able to make a secure perch for himself. When he was settled, he realized how close to collapse he was. Last night's binge had drained him; today's exertions had squeezed him dry.

If anything larger than a squirrel attacked him now, he was finished.

He settled his leaden limbs against the tree, closed his eyes and went on with his reconstruction of last night's events.

"WELL, friend," Billie Benz had said, "come along and let me tell you. Better still, let me show you."

They walked east on 52nd Street, while the deep blue twilight darkened into night. Manhattan's lights came on, stars appeared on the horizon, and a crescent moon glowed through thin haze.

"Where are we going?" Piersen asked.

"Right hyar, *podner*," Benz said.

They were in front of a small brownstone building. A discreet brass sign on the door read NARCOLICS.

"New free drug parlor," said Benz. "It was opened just this evening by Thomas Moriarty, the Reform Candidate for Mayor. No one's heard about it yet."

"Fine!" Piersen said.

There were plenty of free activities in the city. The only problem was getting to them before the crowds collected, because al-

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most everyone was in search of pleasure and change.

Many years back, the Central Eugenics Committee of the United World Government had stabilized the world population at a sensible figure. Not in a thousand years had there been so few people on Earth and never had they been so well cared for. Undersea ecology, hydroponics and full utilization of the surface lands made food and clothing abundantly available—overavailable, in fact. Lodgings for a small, stable population was no problem, with automatic building methods and a surplus of materials. Even luxury goods were no luxury.

It was a safe, stable, static culture. Those few who researched, produced and kept the machines running received generous compensation. But most people just didn't bother working. There was no need and no incentive.

There were some ambitious men, of course, driven to acquire wealth, position, power. They went into politics. They solicited votes by feeding, clothing and entertaining the populace of their districts, out of abundant public funds. And they cursed the fickle voters for switching to more impressive promise-makers.

It was a utopia of sorts. Poverty was forgotten, wars were long gone and everyone had the guarantee of a long, easy life.

It must have been sheer human ingratitude that made the suicide rate so shockingly high.

BENZ showed his passes to the door, which opened at once. They walked down a corridor to a large, comfortably furnished living room. Three men and one woman, early birds who had heard of the new opening, were slumped comfortably on couches, smoking pale green cigarettes. There was a pleasantly unpleasant pungent odor in the air.

An attendant came forward and led them to a vacant divan. "Make yourselves right at home, gentlemen," he said. "Light up a narcolic and let your troubles drift away."

He handed them each a pack of pale green cigarettes.

"What's in this stuff?" Piersen asked.

"Narcolic cigarettes," the attendant told them, "are a choice mixture of Turkish and Virginian tobaccos, with a carefully measured amount of narcola, an intoxicant plant which grows in Venus's equatorial belt."

"Venus?" Benz asked. "I didn't know we'd reached Venus."

"Four years ago, sir," the attendant said. "The Yale Expedition made the first landing and set up a base."

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"I think I read something about that," said Piersen. "Or saw it in a newsreel. Venus. Crude, jungly sort of place, isn't it?"

"Quite crude," the attendant said.

"I thought so," said Piersen. "Hard to keep up with everything. Is this narcola habit-forming?"

"Not at all, sir," the attendant reassured him. "Narcola has the effect alcohol should have, but rarely does—great lift, sensations of well-being, slow taper, no hangover. It comes to you courtesy of Thomas Moriarty, the Reform Candidate for Mayor. Row A-2 in your voting booths, gentlemen. We humbly solicit your votes."

Both men nodded and lighted up.

Piersen began to feel the effects almost at once. His first cigarette left him relaxed, disembodied, with a strong premonition of pleasure to come. His second enhanced these effects and produced others. His senses were marvelously sharpened. The world seemed a delightful place, a place of hope and wonder. And he himself became a vital and necessary part of it.

Benz nudged him in the ribs. "Pretty good, huh?"

"Damned fine," said Piersen. "This Moriarty must be a good man. World needs good men."

"Right," agreed Benz. "Needs smart men."

"Courageous, bold, far-sighted men," Piersen went on emphatically. "*Men like us, buddy, to* mold the future and—" He stopped abruptly.

"Whatsa matter?" Benz asked.

Piersen didn't answer. By a fluke known to all drunkards, the narcotic had suddenly reversed its effect. He had been feeling godlike. Now, with an inebriate's clarity, he saw himself as he was.

He was Walter Hill Piersen, 32, unmarried, unemployed, unwanted. He had taken a job when he was eighteen, to please his parents. But he had given it up after a week, because it bored him and interfered with his sleep. He had considered marriage once, but the responsibilities of a wife and family appalled him. He was almost thirty-three, thin, flabby-muscled and pallid. He had never done anything of the slightest importance to himself or to anyone else, and he never would.

"Tell your buddy all about it, buddy," Benz said.

"Wanna do great things," Piersen mumbled, dragging on the cigarette.

"You do, pal?"

"Damn right! Wanna be adventurer!"

"Why didn't you say so? I'll fix it up for you!" Benz jumped up

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and tugged at Piersen's arm. "Come on!"

"You'll what?" Piersen tried to push Benz away. He just wanted to sit and feel terrible. But Benz yanked him to his feet.

"I know what you need, pal," Benz said. "Adventure, excitement! Well, I know the place for it!"

Piersen frowned thoughtfully, swaying on his feet. "Lean close," he said to Benz. "Gotta whisper."

Benz leaned over. Piersen whispered, "Want adventure—but *don't wanna get hurt.* Get it?"

"Got it," Benz assured him. "Know just what you want. Let's go! Adventure lies ahead! Safe adventure!"

Arm in arm, clutching their packs of narcolics, they staggered out of the Reform Candidate's drug parlor.

A BREEZE had come up, swaying the tree in which Piersen clung. It blew across his hot, damp body, suddenly chilling him. His teeth began to chatter and his arms ached from gripping the smooth branch. His parched throat felt as though it were clogged with fine, hot sand.

The thirst was more than he could stand. If necessary, he'd face a dozen blue-black creatures now for a drink of water.

Slowly he started down the tree, shelving his dim memories of last night. He had to know what happened, but first he needed water.

At the base of the tree, he saw the blue-black creature, its back broken, sprawled motionless upon the ground. He passed it and pushed into the jungle.

He trudged forward, for hours or days, losing all track of time under the glaring, unchanging white sky. The brush tore at his clothing and birds screamed warning signals as he plunged on. He ignored everything, glassy-eyed and rubber-legged. He fell, picked himself up and went on, fell again, and again. Like a robot, he continued until he stumbled upon a thin, muddy brown stream.

With no thought to the dangerous bacteria it might contain, Piersen sprawled on his face and drank.

After a while, he rested and surveyed his surroundings. Close around him were the walls of the jungle—bright, dense, alien. The sky above was glaring white, no lighter or darker than before. And small, unseen life chirped and squeaked in the underbrush.

This was a very lonely place, Piersen decided, and a very dangerous one. He wanted out.

But which way was out? Were there any cities here, any people? And if so, how would he

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ever find them in this directionless wasteland?

And what was he doing here?

He rubbed his unshaven jaw and tried to remember. Last night seemed a million years ago and a totally different life. New York was like a city in a dream. For him, the only truth was this jungle, and the hunger gnawing at his belly, and the strange humming that had just begun.

He looked around, trying to locate the source of the sound. It seemed to come from all sides, from nowhere and everywhere. Piersen doubled his fists and stared until his eyes hurt, trying to catch sight of the new menace.

Then, close to him, a brilliant green shrub moved. Piersen leaped away from it, trembling violently. The shrub shook all over and its thin hooked leaves produced a humming sound.

Then—

The shrub looked at him.

It had no eyes. But Piersen could feel the shrub become *aware* of him, focus on him, come to a decision about him. The shrub hummed louder. Its branches stretched toward him, touched the ground, rooted, sent out searching tendrils which grew, rooted and sent out new tendrils.

The plant was *growing* toward him, moving at the speed of a man walking slowly.

Piersen stared at the sharp, glittering hooked leaves reaching toward him. He couldn't believe it, yet he had to believe it.

And then he remembered the rest of what had happened last night.

"HYAR we be, podner," Benz said, turning into a brightly lighted building on Madison Avenue. He ushered Piersen into the elevator. They rode to the twenty-third floor and stepped into a large, bright reception room.

A discreet sign on one wall read ADVENTURES UNLIMITED.

"I've heard about this place," Piersen said, dragging deeply on a narcolic cigarette. "It's supposed to be expensive."

"Don't worry about that," Benz told him.

A blonde receptionist took their names and led them to the private office of Dr. Srinagar Jones, Action Consultant.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Jones.

He was slight, thin and wore heavy glasses. Piersen found it hard to restrain a giggle. *This* was an Action Consultant?

"So you gentlemen desire adventure?" Jones inquired pleasantly.

"*He* wants adventure," said Benz. "I'm just a friend of his."

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"Of course. Now, then, sir," Jones said, turning to Piersen, "what kind of adventure did you have in mind?"

"Out*door* adventure," Piersen replied, a trifle thickly, but with absolute confidence.

"We have just the thing," Jones said. "Usually there is a fee. But tonight all adventures are free, courtesy of President Main. Row C-1 in your voting booth. Come this way, sir."

"Hold on. I don't want to get killed, you know. Is this adventure safe?"

"Perfectly safe. No other kind of adventure would be tolerated in this day and age. Here's how it works. You relax comfortably on a bed in our Explorer's Room and receive a painless injection. This causes immediate loss of consciousness. Then, through a judicious application of auditory, tactile and other stimuli, we produce an adventure in your mind."

"Like a dream?" Piersen asked.

"That would be the best analogy. This dream adventure is absolutely realistic in content. You experience actual pain, actual emotions. There's no way you can tell it from the real thing. Except, of course, that it *is* a dream and therefore perfectly safe."

"What happens if I'm killed in the adventure?"

"It's the same as dreaming that you're killed. You wake up, that's all. But while you're in this ultra-realistic, vividly colored dream, you have free will and conscious power over your dream movements."

"Do I know all this while I'm having the adventure?"

"Absolutely. While in the dream, you have full knowledge of its dream status."

"Then lead on!" Piersen shouted. "On with the dream!"

THE bright green shrub grew slowly toward him. Piersen burst into laughter. A dream! Of course, it was all a dream! Nothing could harm him. The menacing shrub was a figment of his imagination, like the blue-black animal. Even if the beast's jaws had closed on his throat, he would not have been killed.

He would simply have awakened in the Explorer's Room of Adventures Unlimited.

It all seemed ridiculous now. Why hadn't he realized all this earlier? That blue-black thing was obviously a dream creation. And the bright green shrub was preposterous. It was all rather silly and unbelievable, once you really thought about it.

In a loud voice, Piersen said, "All right. You can wake me up now."

Nothing happened. Then he re-

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membered that you couldn't awaken simply by requesting it. That would invalidate the sense of adventure and destroy the therapeutic effects of excitement and fear upon a jaded nervous system.

He remembered now. The only way you could leave an adventure was by winning through all obstacles. Or by being killed.

The shrub had almost reached his feet. Piersen watched it, marveling at its realistic appearance.

It fastened one of its hooked leaves into the leather of his shoe. Piersen grinned, proud of the way he was mastering his fear and revulsion. He merely had to remember that the thing couldn't hurt him.

But how, he asked himself, could a person have a realistic adventure if he knew all the time that it wasn't real? Surely Adventures Unlimited must have considered that.

Then he remembered the last thing Jones told him.

He had been lying on the white cot and Jones was bending over him, hypodermic needle ready. Piersen had asked, "Look, pal, how can I have an adventure if I *know* it's not real?"

"That has been taken care of," Jones had said. "You see, sir, some of our clients undergo *real* adventures."

"Huh?"

"Real, actual, physical adventures. One client out of many receives the knockout injection, but no further stimulus. He is placed aboard a spaceship and taken to Venus. There he revives and experiences in fact what the others undergo in fantasy. If he wins through, he lives."

"And if not?"

Jones had shrugged his shoulders, waiting patiently, the hypodermic poised.

"That's inhuman!" Piersen had cried.

"We disagree. Consider, Mr. Piersen, the need for adventure in the world today. Danger is necessary, to offset a certain weakening of human fiber which easy times has brought to the race. These fantasy adventures present danger in its safest and most palatable form. But they would lose all value if the person undergoing them did not take them seriously. The adventurer must have the possibility, no matter how remote, that he is truly engaging in a life and death struggle."

"But the ones who really go to Venus—"

"An insignificant percentage," Jones reassured him. "Less than one in ten thousand. Simply to enhance the possibility of danger for the others."

"But is it legal?" Piersen had persisted.

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"Quite legal. On a total percentage basis, you run a greater risk drinking miniscarette or smoking narcolics."

"Well," said Piersen, "I'm not sure I want—"

The hypodermic bit suddenly into his arm.

"Everything will be all right," Jones said soothingly. "Just relax, Mr. Piersen . . ."

That was his last memory before awakening in the jungle.

BY now, the green shrub had reached Piersen's ankle. A slender hooked leaf slid, very slowly, very gently, into his flesh. All he felt was the faintest tickling sensation. After a moment, the leaf turned a dull red.

A blood-sucking plant, Piersen thought with some amusement.

The whole adventure suddenly palled on him. It had been a silly drunken idea in the first place. Enough was enough. He wanted out of this, and immediately.

The shrub edged closer and slid two more hooked leaves into Piersen's leg. The entire plant was beginning to turn a muddy red-brown.

Piersen wanted to go back to New York, to parties, free food, free entertainment and a lot of sleep. If he destroyed this menace, another would spring up. This might go on for days or weeks.

The quickest way home was to let the shrub kill him. Then he could simply wake up.

His strength was beginning to ebb. He sat down, noticing that several more shrubs were growing toward him, attracted by the scent of blood.

"It can't be real," he said out loud. "Who ever heard of a blood-sucking plant, even on Venus?"

High above him were great, black-winged birds, soaring patiently, waiting for their chance at the corpse.

Could this be real?

The odds, he reminded himself, were ten thousand to one that it was a dream. *Only* a dream. A vivid, realistic dream. But a dream, nevertheless.

Still, suppose it was real?

He was growing dizzy and weak from loss of blood. He thought, *I want to go home. The way home is to die. The chance of actual death is so small, so infinitesimal . . .*

The truth burst upon him. In this age, no one would dare risk the life of a voter. Adventures Unlimited couldn't really put a man in jeopardy!

Jones had told him about that one in ten thousand merely to add a sense of reality to the fantasy adventure!

That had to be the truth. He lay back, closed his eyes and prepared to die.

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While he was dying, thoughts stirred in his mind, old dreams and fears and hopes. He remembered the one job he had held and his mingled pleasure and regret at leaving it. He thought of his obtuse, hard-working parents, unwilling to accept the rewards of civilization without, as they put it, earning them. He thought, harder than ever before in his life, and he came into contact with a Piersen whose existence he had never suspected.

THE other Piersen was a very uncomplicated creature. He simply wanted to live. He was determined to live. This Piersen refused to die under any circumstances—even imaginary.

The two Piersens, one motivated by pride, the other by desire for survival, struggled briefly, while strength ebbed out of their body. Then they resolved the conflict upon mutually satisfactory terms.

"That damned Jones thinks I'll die," Piersen said. "Die in order to wake up. Well, I'll be damned if I'll give him the satisfaction!"

It was the only way he could accept his own desire to live.

Frighteningly weak, he struggled to his feet and tried to pull the bloodsucking plant loose. It wouldn't release its grip. With a shout of rage, Piersen reached down and wrenched with all his strength. The hooks slashed his legs as they pulled free, and other hooks slid into his right arm.

But his legs were free now. He kicked aside two more plants and lurched into the jungle, with the green shrub growing up his arm.

Piersen stumbled along until he was far from the other plants. Then he tried to yank the last shrub from his arm.

The shrub caught both his arms, imprisoning them. Sobbing with anger and pain, Piersen swung his arms high and slammed them against the trunk of a tree.

The hooks loosened. Again he slammed his arms against the tree, shutting his eyes to the pain. Again and again, until the shrub released.

Instantly, Piersen began staggering on again.

But he had delayed his life-struggle too long. He was streaming blood from a hundred slashes and the scent was like an alarm bell through the jungle. Overhead, something swift and black descended. Piersen threw himself down and the shape passed over him with a flurry of beating wings, shrilling angrily.

He rolled to his feet and tried to find protection in a thorny bush. A great, black-winged bird with a crimson breast dived again.

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This time, sharp claws caught him in the shoulder and flung him down. The bird landed on his chest with a wild beating of wings. It pecked at his eyes, missed, pecked again.

Piersen lashed out. His fist caught the bird full in the throat, knocking it over.

He scrambled into the thorn bush on all fours. The bird circled, shrilling, trying to find a way in. Piersen moved deeper into the thicket toward safety.

Then he heard a low moan beside him.

He had waited too long. The jungle had marked him for death and would never let him go. Beside him was a long, blue-black, shark-shaped creature, slightly smaller than the first he had encountered, creeping quickly and easily toward him through the thorn thicket.

Caught between a shrieking death in the air and a moaning death on the ground, Piersen came to his feet. He shouted his fear, anger and defiance. And without hesitation, he flung himself at the blue-black beast.

The great jaws slashed. Piersen lay motionless. With his last vestige of consciousness, he saw the jaws widen for the death-stroke.

Can it be real, Piersen wondered, in sudden fear, just before he blanked out.

WHEN he recovered consciousness, he was lying on a white cot, in a white, softly lighted room. Slowly his head cleared and he remembered—his death.

Quite an adventure, he thought. Must tell the boys. But first a drink. Maybe ten drinks and a little entertainment.

He turned his head. A girl in white, who had been sitting in a chair beside his bed, rose and bent over him.

"How do you feel, Mr. Piersen?" she asked.

"Fair," Piersen said. "Where's Jones?"

"Jones?"

"Srinagar Jones. He runs this place."

"You must be mistaken, sir," the girl told him. "Dr. Baintree runs our colony."

"Your *what?*" Piersen shouted.

A man came into the room. "That will be all, Nurse," he said. He turned to Piersen. "Welcome to Venus, Mr. Piersen. I'm Dr. Baintree, Director of Camp Five."

Piersen stared unbelievingly at the tall, bearded man. He struggled out of bed and would have fallen if Baintree hadn't steadied him.

He was amazed to find most of his body wrapped in bandages.

"It was real?" he asked.

Baintree helped him to the window. Piersen looked out on

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cleared land, fences and the distant green edge of the jungle.

"One out of ten thousand!" Piersen said bitterly. "Of all the damned luck! I could have been killed!"

"You nearly were," said Baintree. "But your coming here wasn't a matter of luck or satistics."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Piersen, let me put it this way. Life is easy on Earth. The problems of human existence have been solved — but solved, I fear, to the detriment of the race. Earth stagnates. The birth rate continues to fall, the suicide rate goes up. New frontiers are opening in space, but hardly anyone is interested in going to them. Still, the frontiers *must* be manned, if the race is to survive."

"I have heard that exact speech," Piersen said, "in the newsreels, on the solido, in the papers—"

"It didn't seem to impress you."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true," Baintree assured him, "whether you believe it or not."

"YOU'RE a fanatic," Piersen said. "I'm not going to argue with you. Suppose it is

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true—where do I fit in?"

"We are desperately undermanned," said Baintree. "We've offered every inducement, tried every possible method of recruitment. But no one wants to leave Earth."

"Naturally. So?"

"This is the only method that works. Adventures Unlimited is run by us. Likely candidates are transported here and left in the jungle. We watch to see how they make out. It provides an excellent testing ground—for the individual as well as for us."

"What would have happened," Piersen asked, "if I hadn't fought back against the shrubs?"

Baintree shrugged his shoulders.

"And so you recruited me," Piersen said. "You ran me through your obstacle course, and I fought like a good little man, and you saved me just in the nick of time. Now I'm supposed to be flattered that you picked me, huh? Now I'm supposed to suddenly realize I'm a rough, tough outdoor man? Now I'm supposed to be filled with a courageous far-sighted pioneering spirit?"

Baintree watched him steadily.

"And now I'm supposed to sign up as a pioneer? Baintree, you must think I'm nuts or some-

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thing. Do you honestly think I'm going to give up a very pleasant existence on Earth so I can grub around on a farm or hack through a jungle on Venus? To hell with you, Baintree, and to hell with your whole salvation program."

"I quite understand how you feel," Baintree answered. "Our methods are somewhat arbitrary, but the situation requires it. When you've calmed down—"

"I'm perfectly calm now!" Piersen screamed. "Don't give me any more sermons about saving the world! I want to go home to a nice comfortable pleasure palace."

"You can leave on this evening's flight," Baintree said.

"What? Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"I don't get it," said Piersen. "Are you trying psychology on me? It won't work — I'm going home. I don't see why any of your kidnap victims stay here."

"They don't," Baintree said.

"What?"

"Occasionally, one decides to stay. But for the most part, they react like you. They do *not* discover a sudden deep love for the soil, an overwhelming urge to conquer a new planet. That's storybook stuff. They want to go home. But they often agree to help us on Earth."

"How?"

"By becoming recruiters," Baintree said. "It's fun, really. You eat and drink and enjoy yourself, the same as ever. And when you find a likely looking candidate, you talk him into taking a dream adventure with Adventures Unlimited — exactly as Benz did with you."

PIERSEN looked startled. "Benz? That worthless bum is a recruiter?"

"Certainly. Did you think recruiters were starry-eyed idealists? They're people like you, Piersen, who enjoy having a good time, enjoy being on the inside of things, and perhaps even enjoy doing some good for the human race, as long as it's no trouble to them. I think you'd like the work."

"I might try it for a while," Piersen said. "For a kick."

"That's all we ask," said Baintree.

"But how do you get new colonists?"

"Well, that's a funny thing. After a few years, many of our recruiters get curious about what's happening here. And they return."

"Well," Piersen said, "I'll try this recruiting kick for a while. But only for a while, as long as I feel like it."

"Of course," said Baintree. "Come, you'd better get packed."

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"And don't count on me coming back. I'm a city boy. I like my comfort. The salvation racket is strictly for the eager types."

"Of course. By the way, you did very well in the jungle."

"I did?"

Baintree nodded gravely.

Piersen stayed at the window, staring at the fields, the buildings, the fences and the distant edge of the jungle which he had fought and nearly overcome.

"We'd better leave," said Baintree.

"Eh? All right, I'm coming," Piersen said.

He turned slowly from the window with a faint trace of irritation that he tried to and couldn't identify.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

FORECAST

NEXT MONTH brings back Isaac Asimov, very much alive and kicking up a legal hurricane in *Galley Slave*, a stormy novelet that also returns one of the most famous fiction characters to literary life. A fictive resurrection indeed—but a lethal one. For the Three Laws of Positronic Robots make it impossible to kill a human, but there is a loophole . . . murdering a man after his death!

Clifford D. Simak also drops in for a visit, bringing a handsome present, a novelet called *Carbon Copy*. Being a scrupulous real estate agent and a devout angler, Homer Jackson knows a clean sale from a fish story—but this is one time he gets really hooked! The fact that his catcher wears shoes on the wrong feet is upsetting enough; from that point on, though, things add up to more and more money and less and less sense!

Along with probably another novelet and short stories and our regular features, Willy Ley takes us downstairs for an eye-popping inspection of *The Spaceship in the Basement!* Sounds to you like the gag about the man who built a boat in the cellar and then couldn't get it out? All right, smile now—you won't when you discover that the basement spaceship exists at this very moment, who built it and why—and that getting it out of the basement is the least of all the problems it has to face!

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YOU WERE RIGHT, JOE

By J. T. McINTOSH

You had it taped all the way, pal—but how come you didn't say this would happen to me?

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

I CAN'T be sure you're getting this, Joe, but you've been right about so many of the other things, I guess you're very likely right about that, too.

You remember you figured that I wouldn't just materialize naked in the middle of a city street. You said I'd be a genuine human being of the time, correctly dressed and with some kind of personal history. But you warned me — and I appreciate this, Joe; you didn't have to warn me, but you did it — you warned me that there was no telling I'd be like *me*.

I may as well admit now I wasn't happy about that. I never was much to look at and there wasn't any danger of my becoming the heavyweight champion of the world. But I'd got used to being the way I was, and I didn't

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altogether like the idea of seeing a stranger's face every time I looked in the mirror.

If I'd known what I was going to be like, I'd never have done it. I'm sorry, Joe, but even for you I couldn't have faced it. Now that I'm here, though, I'll just have to make the best of it.

You were right, Joe, all along the line. Nobody ran screaming when I got here and I haven't been arrested. I was fitted into a spot that was made for me, dressed in the right clothes, able to speak the right language. I've got a name. And just as you said, I'm different. *Different?* That's like saying Gina Lollobrigida isn't like Aunt Phoebe!

When I first got here, I looked around, of course. I saw people walking about and colored buildings with hardly any straight lines in them. It took no more than a glance to show me this was a pretty advanced civilization, many centuries ahead of our time.

Before I did any more looking around, I did the second obvious thing. I looked down at what I could see of me.

I nearly jumped out of my skin, Joe. You know those ads: *You, too, can have a body like mine?* Well, that was me — golden tan, rippling muscles, chest a mile wide. Yeah, me Tarzan. I wore very short, tight trunks and shoes, that was all, and believe me, I was scared stiff of myself.

WELL, you warned me, Joe. Funny, I was prepared to find myself very young. I even took the risk of finding myself very old. But I never saw myself as Superman. I can't seem to get used to the idea at all.

It wasn't that everybody around here was like this. Far from it. They all seemed young and fit and good-looking, but not big and not strong. I could see right away by the attention I got that I was something special.

And it scared the life out of me. Some people wouldn't mind finding themselves looking like a Greek god. Me, I'm not the type. I've spent my life not being noticed — you know that, Joe — and I wasn't cut out to be a symbol of manhood. I don't think I'll ever get used to it.

Anyway, Joe, apart from this, everything seems to be all right. And I'd like to say right away that I think it's safe for you to come along, too, if you want to. You never said you were sending me as a guinea pig, to see whether it was safe to go yourself, but I'm not completely dumb. I was ready to take the gamble just the same.

If you come, you'll probably also find yourself a gorgeous hunk

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of man. You'll be able to figure it out better than me, but I guess maybe it's because the world we live in makes us tougher than the people living in *this* world have to be. When we show up here, we come out a lot bigger and stronger than we ever dreamed we were.

Well, maybe you won't mind being Superman, Joe. Come to think of it, I guess it'll suit you fine.

It's difficult to explain what I know and don't know about this world. My name's Elan Rock, by the way. I know *that*. I know the language, and though I haven't used it yet, I'm sure that when I do it'll come out just right. I know how to open doors and operate what they use instead of phones here and what to say instead of "Good morning" and how to do what they call reading and where I can get their idea of a drink.

I know everything like that. But what kind of society this is and how it's governed and what year it is and why there are no square buildings and why everybody walks instead of using cars, I don't know.

Now I'll have to break off for a while, Joe. When I'm used to this, I'll be able to talk to you no matter what I'm doing. Meantime, I don't want to make any big mistakes in my first few minutes here in the future.

I'll call you again soon.

I KNOW a lot more now, Joe. I've seen myself in a mirror and it's just as I thought, only worse. I've got the face of Apollo to go with the figure of Charles Atlas. I'd tell you more about how I look, but you wouldn't believe it.

The way I figure it, I couldn't just jump into the future and be somebody who'd never existed before. Elan Rock had to half-exist for twenty-five years so that I could come shooting up from the Dark Ages and *be* him.

I think you said something like that once, Joe, only I couldn't digest all you were telling me in such a short time before I got started.

You were right, too, about my reaching a place which was just within my limit of comprehension, a place just short of an environment that would make me go crazy.

And yet it's a lot simpler than ours. I know the whole code of laws, for example. I happened to see them a few minutes ago, over the door of what passes here for a Department of Justice. Translated, they go something like this:

You mustn't annoy other people. And if you're other people, you mustn't allow yourself to be annoyed too easily.

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That's all there is to it. That code is taken to cover murder and stealing and other things like that which most people would agree are crimes. You can kill yourself if you like — that's no crime. The only sex crimes are acts that would break one of these two laws. And notice that it's a crime to be annoyed too easily.

You know, I got a respect for these people when I realized these were the only laws they needed. It wouldn't be any good trying to run *our* society under a pair of laws like that. Herb Jones would prove in court that he was annoyed by long underwear hanging out in Homer Smith's back yard. And a smart lawyer would prove that Herb Jones hadn't been too easily annoyed. So, according to the law, Herb Jones would get heavy damages.

You can give people a tremendous amount of freedom if you know they won't abuse it. That's how things must be here.

I was just beginning to get used to the idea of being Apollo when I hit snag number two.

I'm trying to suspend judgment about this, Joe. Naturally, morals differ in different societies. All the same, it gave me my second shock when a little dark girl, pretty as anything, took my hand and — well, gave me to understand that she expected me to go up to her apartment and make love to her.

I smiled and shook my head, and she was obviously surprised and hurt, but what could I do? It's bad enough suddenly becoming a beefcake king without being in a place where sex is so free and open that — hell, you remember how I used to get all red and stutter when I had to talk to a girl!

It was only after the little brunette had gone on, her lovely straight back a living exclamation point, that I realized I could have politely thanked her and explained that I kept getting such propositions and a man can spread himself only so far and — you know what I mean.

I'll try that next time. I'm uneasily convinced that there's going to be a next time, maybe in five minutes. When it happens, I'll . . .

SORRY I broke off like that, Joe.

Before we go any further, we'd better have an understanding about the power over me that you say you have. You told me that if you didn't hear from me, if I held out on you, you could do something and I'd die. Frankly, I don't believe it, Joe. I think you said that just to keep me in line.

I don't think you can do any-

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thing to me now any more than you can talk to me. You explained why I could communicate with you and why you couldn't communicate with me. I didn't understand what you said, but you were very convincing, anyway.

You weren't very convincing, though, when you said you could still control me while I'm here and you're still there. Didn't you know, Joe, that people can sometimes tell the truth from a lie, even when they don't understand either of them?

But all the same, Joe, I'm not running out on you. I'm going to keep reporting to you honestly what's going on.

Only if I'm wrong and you *can* reach clear up to here, Lord knows how many hundred years in the future, don't put the bite on me simply because I cut off for a few minutes. I may have a good reason.

Like just then. You can't blame me for cutting off that way. Something so screwy just happened that, for a moment, I thought the time-jump had driven me nuts.

Along the street came a half dozen savages in animal skins. I looked at the other people around for my cue. They seemed surprised but not frightened. So I guessed it was just an act, some stunt or other, maybe part of a parade, and tried to look surprised but not frightened, like everybody else.

It was the savages who were frightened. They were yelling and running and glancing behind them. One carrying a stone club stopped in front of a woman a few yards from me, said something and raised his club.

Sooner or later, I had to find out if I was as strong as I looked. I stepped in and let the caveman have it on the chin. At the last second I realized that if I gave him all I had, I'd probably break his neck, so I pulled the punch.

What do you know, Joe — I knocked a caveman twenty-five yards! It must have been all of that before he stopped staggering back and went down. He was plenty tough, because even after that, he wasn't out.

On the other hand, neither he nor his companions seemed to have any urge to come at me with their stone clubs.

"Oh, you wonderful man!" said the girl I'd saved from a fatal headache. I'd give her a better line if I could, but that's the only way I can translate it without the various suggestions which accompanied it.

OTHER people in the street were hurrying over. The savages exchanged quick glances, turned tail and ran. The man I'd

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floored was last in line for a while, but before they disappeared from sight, he had pushed past the others and was in front again. That's leadership for you.

I shrugged and walked on, pretending this sort of thing happened every day. Nobody stopped me, though there was excited conversation behind me. I didn't look back.

I don't know what that incident was all about. I'd have stopped and talked about it, only I didn't dare.

Maybe not everybody is as civilized as the people in this city. There's no law that children should go to school, for instance, so maybe the morons and drones of this community go outside and live as savages. Maybe there are people who don't believe in civilization. Maybe . . .

Your guess is as good as mine, Joe. Probably better.

There's a park beside me now, and I'd go inside and stop to consider things, if not for one thing.

It seems very likely to me that if girls make advances in the open street here, the parks must really be something for shy young guys like me. Flustering, to say the least.

I've got a lot of things to find out, and sooner or later I've got to take the risk of talking to people. The trouble is, how can I be natural when I feel as unnatural as a kitten laying eggs? Can I go up to the first pretty girl I see and say, "Take my hand, I'm a stranger in paradise"?

I can't. She would.

Nevertheless, I'll have to talk to somebody the first time I see an opportunity.

There must be some kind of festival going on. Here's another procession — about twenty people, coming along the side of the park. I can't make out what they're supposed to be, but they're quite a sight. Like how Hollywood in our time would represent the people of the future. The women in brass bikinis and the men carrying enormous rayguns. And all as clean as if they'd been washed in the newest detergent. They look a bit puzzled. Maybe they've lost their way.

I'm slipping into the park in case they ask me. If I keep moving, the local talent won't get a chance to take a good look at me and decide I'm just what they always wanted.

Looks like I was right about the parks. It shouldn't be so unexpected, I guess. It was in our time that necking in public came in. This is only a step further.

Now what in hell's this?

BELIEVE it or not, Joe, I just killed a saber-toothed tiger! I know that's hard to swallow,

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Joe. There were three of them, worse than anything you ever saw in a book or movie. They weren't really saber-toothed tigers —they were something there isn't a name for. Perhaps nobody yet dug up a skeleton of one of these things.

There were these three tigers and half a dozen couples and me within thirty yards or so. I didn't have much time to take a good squint at the beasts. The biggest of them came at me. I guess he figured that once I was out of the way, the other twelve packed lunches could be picked up without any argument. He was right at that.

I'm not boasting, Joe—I stood where I was because I was too scared to run. I told you I'm big, but not compared with a saber-toothed tiger.

He leaped at me, and I remembered how Tarzan used to throw himself on tigers' backs and get a half-Nelson grip on them. It didn't seem too practical, however.

I dodged the first rush. Somebody threw a knife at the tiger and nearly hit me. I got hold of it and faced the beast again. I didn't think for a moment that I was going to be able to do anything with the knife, which was a little folding one with a three-inch blade, but when you're practically naked and have to defend yourself against a wild animal, you use a wooden sword if that's the only thing available.

The other specimens held off, waiting to see what happened. All the women were screaming, which helped, I guess. These creatures didn't seem to know any more about human beings than human beings knew about them.

The next time the tiger came at me, I ripped his side open as he passed, and from the roars he let loose, I began to think for the first time that maybe I *would* be alive in five minutes' time, after all.

It was that knife. I don't know yet whether it was just sharp or if it had some other quality about it, but it cut through the beast's flesh like water. And though a two-inch-deep cut all along his side didn't by any means put him out of action, he didn't like it.

Why I had a chance, Joe, was because the poor ugly tiger, with all his strength, didn't have reaction-time worth a damn. I could run around him like a speedboat circling a scow. Talk about telegraphing punches—this creature didn't telegraph them, he sent long letters about them by pony express.

I slashed the tendons about his neck and it was no more dangerous than crossing a busy street at midday — less, probably. He struggled a lot and he took a

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long time to die, but in the end he did die.

I turned to the other tigers. They had seen what had happened, however, and showed unexpected intelligence by running as hard as they could go for a clump of trees two hundred yards away. The beasts disappeared among them and no one was sorry.

The six couples who were still around rushed up to congratulate me, pat me on the back and say I was wonderful. Two of the girls kissed me, and their escorts (I guess that's the word) didn't seem to mind. I didn't mind too much myself. In time, I think I could get used to this world.

But not to the sudden appearance of three unfriendly prehistoric monsters.

WE got out of the park without wasting any time about it, just in case what had happened before might happen again.

I found myself walking with a man and girl who talked so easily that I couldn't let the chance slip. There's no reserve among these people, Joe, and if they're surprised at the things you ask, they hide it politely.

It seemed that the arrival of the three tigers in the park had been as big a shock to them as it was to me. They weren't used to things like that. None of them showed any desire to become used to them, either.

So the sudden arrival of three prehistoric monsters wasn't a normal hazard of living in this world.

The couple I talked to had been as frightened as the rest, but they got over it pretty quickly. They're not nervous, these people. Put them in danger and they're frightened; remove the danger and they shrug and say they're glad that's over.

Maybe that means there isn't much mental illness about. So why the savages?

These two people were soon willing to talk about anything at all, and a casual remark by the girl about my being alone gave me a chance to find out about the sex setup here.

Seems what they've done is separate love and sex. If you want someone, you don't have to pretend to yourself and her and everybody else that you're in love with her. On the other hand, if you're in love with a girl, you aren't necessarily limited to her and her only.

It's not so very different from things in our time, except they don't kid themselves and each other about it here. There's still love and there's still marriage, of course, but whether you're in love or not, or married or not, the usual thing is to have a fairly full sex life. Unless you don't want to.

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And all I have to do if I want to be left alone — which I do, at least meantime — is wear a silver bracelet on my right arm. Which I'm now doing. One of my new friends gave it to me.

I didn't stay with the people I'd met in the park; I slipped away from them as soon as I could. It seems to me the best way of gaining information is getting a little at a time from different people. That way I won't reveal the full extent of my ignorance to anybody, just little bits of it.

I'm out of the park now and back on the main streets. There shouldn't be any saber-toothed tigers roaming around loose out here.

These don't look like main streets. I haven't seen a car or plane or truck or bicycle or wheelbarrow. Everything that moves on wheels does so in special underground lanes.

That's the solution to the traffic problem — no traffic, no problem.

I don't precisely know how you get to the underground lanes. That, however, is a question which can wait.

Already I'm getting used to the style of architecture. I think I like it.

Smooth curves have always been more beautiful than straight lines. We built in stone and in straight lines because we didn't know any better.

Here most of the material is plastic of some kind — buildings, windows, pavement, everything. A moment ago, I bent to feel the pavement when no one was looking. It's perfectly smooth, unblemished, something between stone and rubber, but it's too soft for stone and too hard for rubber. It's obviously molded and it wears well. I couldn't leave any marks on it with my fingernail, though it gave when I pressed it.

In the streets, there's nothing but people walking. People not in any hurry, all very young-looking (maybe the older people use the public transportation). Friendly people, happy people.

I know what you're thinking, Joe — there must be a catch somewhere.

All I know is, so far I haven't seen it. Unless it's the saber-toothed tigers.

THIS is getting beyond a joke. The caveman didn't give me much trouble, I dodged the men with the rayguns and the prehistoric monsters, and I managed to handle the saber-toothed tigers. But if this sort of thing goes on much longer, communication from me is going to stop very suddenly.

You won't like that, Joe, because you'll never know what

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happened to me. I won't like it myself. I like this place, except the hazards. I'd like to stay in it.

All in one piece, though.

This time it was men in red coats with the most primitive-looking muskets I ever saw. They were firing them, too. I didn't see anybody hit, but that doesn't mean these men weren't shooting to kill. The guns they were using didn't seem to be accurate to much closer than ninety degrees, which was just as well.

Perhaps somebody mopped them up. I didn't wait to see. Neither did anyone else. We didn't exactly stampede in panic, but we didn't waste any time getting out of range of those muskets.

This wasn't part of any game, Joe. I'm beginning to get ideas about this.

Suppose they do time experiments here. Suppose there's a sort of cowcatcher to brush off people and things who wander across the track. Or suppose there's a sort of time magnetism which pulls all time travelers in here.

How the saber-toothed tigers and the savages with stone clubs could be time travelers, I don't know, but any theory's better than none.

Only how come I landed up just as you said I would, a duly accepted member of this world, dressed in the right clothes and twice the man I was before, while all the others appear exactly as they were in their own time?

I guess you've got an answer, Joe, as usual. Wish you could pass it on to me.

Here's something else. About a dozen people, men and women, in ball dress. Seventeenth century, I guess. They're blinking and staring around.

Gosh, I thought *we* invented the lowcut dress. The dress that redhead's wearing wouldn't get past the Hays Office if it was three inches higher. No, that's an exaggeration. It wouldn't get past the Hays Office if it was *four* inches higher.

YOU probably got some of that, Joe.

It was awkward. These refugees from the seventeenth century picked me to talk to. The redhead came straight to me. Her manner was prim and correct, which showed she was a lady, but her eyes were no lady's. They were even more inviting than curious.

I treated her like a sister.

The trouble was, I could understand what these people were saying and no one else who was around could. I found it hard to make up my mind whether to pretend not to understand them or not.

I guessed from the way they blinked and shaded their eyes

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that it had been night where they came from. As a matter of fact, they'd been at a ball.

Naturally they wanted to know what it was all about. Before I'd really made up my mind whether to admit I could understand them or not, I found myself answering their questions.

Since this group, unlike the redcoats, was obviously puzzled rather than hostile, they were soon in the center of an excited crowd, chattering away but unable to understand a word.

I kept saying a word or two to the people beside me as well as talking to the strangers, to make it clear which side I was on. People offered me suggestions about what to tell the visitors and I did as they said. No one seemed much surprised that only I could talk to them. Everybody assumed, I guess, that I was a history student or something.

This went on for about ten minutes. Then the strangers winked out like a light and we were left staring stupidly at each other.

I didn't draw attention to myself this time by being the first to go on my way. But when it was clear that nobody suspected I knew any more about the incident than they did, I made my escape as soon as I decently could.

One side issue I'd like to mention is this, Joe. Humanity really is on the upgrade. Looking at these people from the seventeenth century and comparing them with the people here, I couldn't doubt that there had been a big advance in intelligence, looks, poise and everything else that counts. It was like seeing a mongrel beside a pedigree pup.

Even the redhead, who obviously regarded herself as a beauty, was nothing special compared with any girl in the crowd.

I'd hardly got away from that when, in the very next street, I saw a bullfight, of all things. At first the bull and the matador didn't seem to be aware that things weren't what they'd been a few minutes before.

Then the matador looked up and stared, petrified. The bull nearly got him. He turned just in time, but his mind was no longer on the job. I don't blame him.

The bull and the matador didn't last as long as the visitors from the seventeenth century. They couldn't have been here more than a couple of minutes.

I hope all these people got back where they came from. I liked that redhead, despite her gap teeth. I didn't care for the matador and the bull, but I don't wish them any harm.

JOE, I don't know how to say this.

I've been picked up. It wasn't

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an arrest — they made that clear from the start. In fact, they're very interested in me and it looks as if I'm going to have a great time here as the Hercules from the Past.

There were three men and two women, and they apologized for interfering with my liberty. Seems I have the same rights as everybody else here.

But there was desperate urgency, they said. They promised to explain everything later. Meanwhile, they had to insist on taking me somewhere in a hurry.

They knew my name and all about me. They even knew I wasn't the same as I'd been in my own time, because though nothing like this has ever happened, once it had happened it took them less than half an hour to figure out exactly what *had* happened.

Joe, I feel like a heel. But they told me to tell you this. They told me they felt worse about it than I do.

You see, if I'd simply landed up here and made no attempt to get in touch with you, they might never have known what had happened. But this link with you is the thing that's caused all the trouble.

We're holding open a hole in time, Joe. And as long as it's open, anything, anywhere, anytime, can fall right through the hole.

They told me there's a sort of dimensional elastic stretched all through time because of you and me. They can't leave it like that any longer. It could pull time itself apart.

Joe, you always said it was up to everybody to look out for himself. That's what they're doing, so you were right about that, too.

I mean you've been right about so many things that I got them to let me explain what will happen so you'll have a chance to figure a way out.

You see, they're cutting the elastic, Joe. And you know what's going to happen? They say I'll be all right because I'm here and they're going to cut it on my side.

But when it comes shooting back through time, it's going to pack one hell of a wallop.

You've got a few minutes to work it out. You can do it, Joe. After all, look how often you were right.

Good luck, Joe — and take care of yourself.

— J. T. McINTOSH

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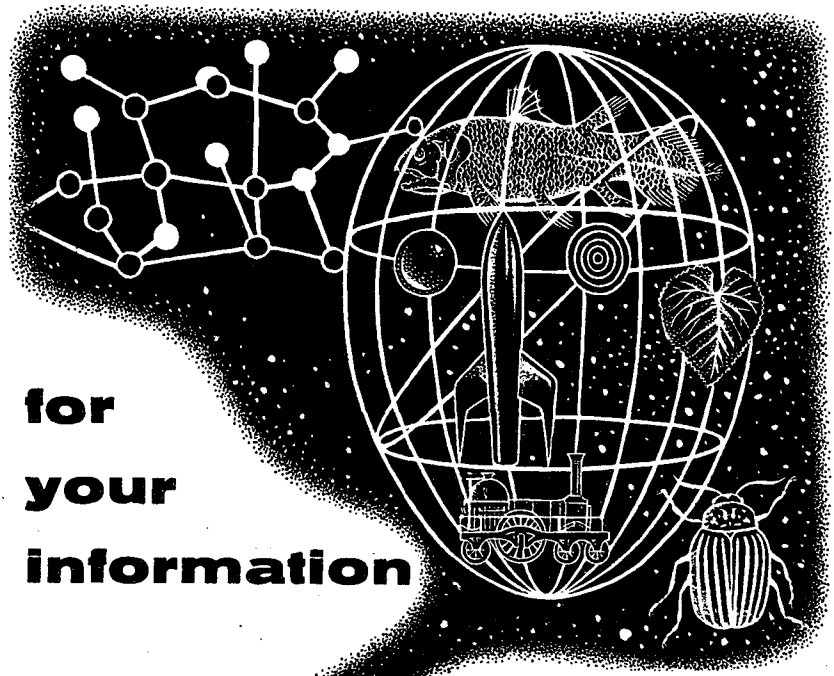
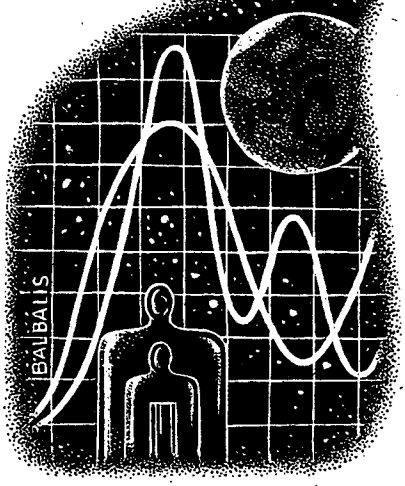


for your information

BY WILLY LEY



ON WITH THE DODO HUNT!

ABOUT 130 miles of open sea separate the two islands of Mauritius and Réunion. This is not a long distance for birds with a reasonable power of flight and it is only logical that many birds are common to both islands and even to Madagascar. For a flightless bird, however, 130 miles of open sea might

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as well be 3,000 miles — it could no more cross the one than the other. Hence it is obvious that the Mauritius dodo, of which Peter Mundy said specifically that it "can neither flye nor swimm," could not cross over to Réunion. Nor could a flightless bird of Réunion cross over to Mauritius.

Logically, then, if there also was a dodo on Réunion, it could not be expected to be the same as the dodo of Mauritius. Similar, yes, but only that. Their ancestors, presumably still capable of flight when they somehow got to the Mascarene islands, were no doubt the same. But even a short separation, as geologists speak of time, would produce very noticeable differences.

Well, there *was* a dodo on Réunion and it *did* differ from the Mauritius dodo, but for more than a hundred years, naturalists did their best to overlook this difference. Yet the very first witness pointed it out. He was an Englishman by the name of J. Tatton who, in 1625, published an account of a voyage made a dozen years earlier under Captain Castleton.

Reporting on Réunion, he wrote: "There is a store of Landfowl, both small and great, plentie of Doves, great Parrats, and such like; and a great fowl of the bigness of a Turkie, very fat, and so short-winged that they cannot flie, being white, and in a manner tame; and so are all other fowles, as having not been troubled or feared with shot."

The only other witness who saw the Réunion dodo on the island and wrote about it was the Dutch traveler Willem Ijsbrantszoon Bontekoe van Hoorn. He spent three weeks there in 1619, and not only described what is unmistakably a dodo, but even referred to it as a *Dad-eersen*. Unfortunately, he did not say anything about its color.

LATER researchers, though, kept coming across pictures which did not jibe with the other dodo pictures. Not only was the plumage white with yellow wing feathers, but they were different in other respects, too. The feet were more slender, the tail was different and so was the bill.

Now it is true that there are sketches of the Mauritius dodo in which the bill looks different, the reason being that the moulting dodo also shed the sheath of the bill. But these white dodos seemed to have their sheath in place. The pictures are all by just two artists, Pieter Holsteyn (around 1640) and Pieter Withoos (around 1685). Since it is most unlikely that a full-grown specimen would live for forty-five years in captivity, this indicates

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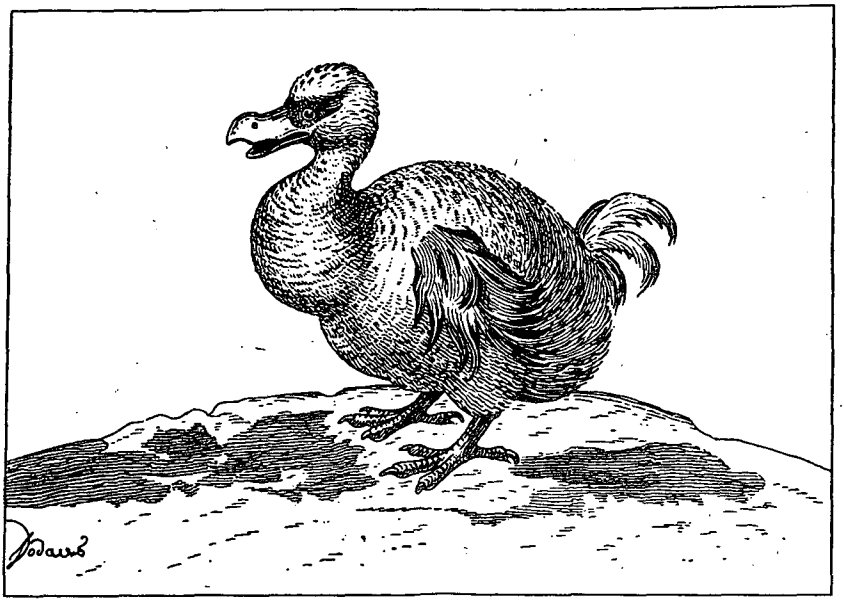

Fig. 1: Sketch of the White Dodo of Réunion, by Pieter Holsteyn, early seventeenth century

that two specimens of the white dodo reached Europe.

The older naturalists failed to draw a clear distinction and even H. E. Strickland, in his monumental work on the dodo (1848), did not do so.

The white dodo was introduced to science as a distinct species as late as 1907, when the Hon. W. Rothschild published his work *Extinct Birds*. (It had the subtitle: "An attempt to unite in one Volume a short Account of those Birds which have become extinct in historical Times, etc.," but the short account turned out to be in folio with no less than 45 color plates.) The scientific name proposed for it was *Didus borbonicus*. In 1937, Dr. Hachisuka changed the scientific name (for various reasons that do not interest us here) to *Victoriornis imperialis*.

Probably because Réunion is more mountainous than Mauritius, the white dodo lived longer than the gray dodo. There is a report that Mahé de la Bourdonnais, when he was governor of both islands, sent one to France. There is no record from the other end — we don't know whether it got to France or not — but Mahé de la Bourdonnais

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was governor from 1735-1746, long after the Mauritius dodo was extinct.

The Réunion dodo fails to be present for the first time in a survey made in 1801. It must have succumbed to dogs, rats and pigs during the latter half of the eighteenth century. That there was still something else to be said about Réunion was not even suspected until recently. But this additional mystery can best be explained with a detour to the third of the Mascarene islands, Rodriguez.

As has been told in the preceding issue, the island was first reached by the Portuguese Diogo Fernandes Pereira in 1507. It took almost two centuries until settlers got there, and even these went to Rodriguez only as a second choice.

They were French Huguenots who were supposed to go to Réunion from Holland. It was a small group of only eleven men. Their chosen leader was a man a few years past fifty at the time whose name was François Leguat. His younger brother was also in the group.

THE Dutch ship, with the French Protestants aboard, left Holland on September 4, 1690, and arrived at Réunion on April 3 of the following year. What happened then is not quite clear, but it seems that it had been believed in Holland that the French had abandoned the island. When the ship's captain realized that they had not, he did not land but set course for Rodriguez, where the French stayed for about two years. Then they built a boat and sailed for Mauritius.

A weird and senseless odyssey was the result of this act. About half a year after they had landed, they were discovered by the governor who, after a few months of deliberation, banished them to a small rocky island offshore. There they were kept prisoners for three years and then shipped, still as prisoners, to Batavia. A year later, they were released and sent back to Holland as free men, where they arrived in June, 1698.

François Leguat did not stay long, but went to England, where he rewrote the journal he had kept all along for publication. In 1708, both Leguat's French original and an English translation appeared.

Other voyagers had said before Leguat that there were "dodos" on Rodriguez, but Leguat was the first man who had lived there for any length of time. Moreover, Leguat could draw. He provided illustrations for his book and there can be little doubt that he had made the sketches on the spot, because some of them are

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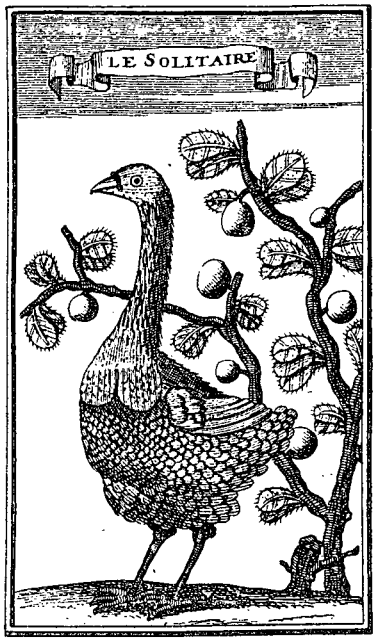

Fig. 2: The Solitaire of Rodriguez, as pictured in François Leguat's book of 1708. Drawing probably by Leguat himself.

rather complicated maps and plans.

"Of all the Birds in the Island," the English edition read, "the most remarkable is that which goes by the name of *Solitary*, tho' there are abundance of them. The Feathers of the Males are of a brown grey Colour: the Feet and Beak are like a Turkey's, but a little more crooked. They have scarce any Tail, but their Hind-part covered with Feathers is roundish, like the Crupper of a Horse; they are taller than Turkeys . . . The Bone of their Wing grows greater towards the Extremity, and forms a little round Mass under the Feathers, as big as a Musket Ball. That and its Beak are the chief Defence of this Bird. 'Tis very hard to catch it in the Woods, but easie in open Places, because we run faster than they . . . Some of the Males weigh forty-five Pounds."

LEGUAT reported that the males were brown in color, the females either brown "or fair, the colour of blonde hair"; most likely the brown ones were older females. He also mentioned that the females had a "head-band, like the head-band of Widows, high upon their Beak," and that lighter feathers on their chest formed an outline like the bosom of a woman. Leguat's drawing, therefore, is that of a female, since the males lacked these characteristics.

There is no other drawing of a solitary besides Leguat's. However, just as in the case of the Mauritius dodo, remains of the solitary have been excavated on Rodriguez, so that a few nearly complete skeletons could be constructed.

Again the story has a few wrinkles which were added later.

In 1761, one of the famous transits of the planet Venus

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across the face of the Sun was due to take place and Rodriguez happened to be in such a geographical position that a fine observation of the transit could be made from there. The man to go to Rodriguez for this purpose was Abbé Pingré. In addition to doing the astronomical job for which he had taken the trip, Abbé Pingré reported that the solitaries were still around. He is the last man to have seen them.

Some five years later, Pingré's colleague and compatriot Le Monnier decided that the expedition should be honored in some manner. He had discovered a number of small stars in the space between the constellations Libra, Scorpio and Draco which could be put together into a new constellation. He was going to call it *Solitarius* to honor Pingré, Rodriguez and the transit of Venus expedition.

But he needed a picture of the solitary, and since his compatriot Brisson had recently published an enormous book on birds, he felt sure that it would be in there. Looking through the entries, he found a *solitaire* listed and copied the picture onto his star map. I don't know whether Le Monnier ever learned that the picture he used was that of *Turdus solitarius,* the solitary thrush!

The other wrinkle is tied up

Fig. 3: The gable stone of Veere on Walcheren, discovered by Prof. Oudemans

with the name of Geoffroy Atkinson, a professor of Romance literature who has written several books with titles like "The Extraordinary Voyage in French Literature before 1700," "The Extraordinary Voyage in French Literature, 1700 to 1720" and so forth. Personally, I failed to be enchanted by them; they are solid work, but I had the impression that Atkinson knew literature and nothing else.

Now I learn from Hachisuka that Atkinson, in 1921, went overboard with his interest in extraordinary voyages and declared that Leguat never traveled! He could "trace" every item in Le-

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Fig. 4: The so-called Dodo of Florence. Note resemblance to the Dutch gable stone

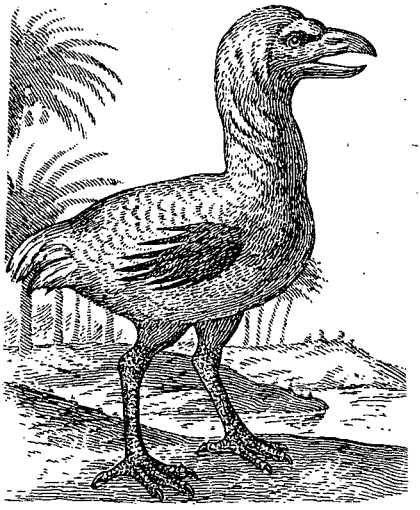

Fig. 5: Female Réunion solitaire, picture discovered by Dr. S. Killermann

guat's journal to its "sources." The account of the Cape of Good Hope came from this book, the sea turtles from that book, the story of his imprisonment from still another book, the building of a boat from somebody else's memoirs.

ONE biologist who read this began to wonder. Leguat had said things about the anatomy of the solitary which were correct, as the skeletons proved, but which could not be found in any other book.

While the biologist was still brooding over the article, two French librarians very politely requested that Atkinson answer a few simple questions, to wit:

If Leguat had never rounded the Cape of Good Hope, why do the archives of Cape Town tell about the ship, its arrival, departure and so forth, all with the same dates as given by Leguat? Then, if Leguat never saw Rodriguez, why does the earliest map of the island (other than Leguat's own) name a few places after him? Why are there official reports from Mauritius telling of the arrival, imprisonment and deportation of refugees from Rodriguez? And, finally, why is there correspondence with the fleet commander about the trip to and return from Batavia?

Well, Atkinson did accomplish

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one thing. Before him, nobody had doubted the authenticity of Leguat's journal. Now we are sure that it cannot be doubted.

It remains to tell the scientific name of Leguat's solitary. It is *Pezophaps solitarius.* The first of these two names is put together from two Greek words: *pezós,* which means "pedestrian," and *phaps,* which means "pigeon."

Some readers who know something about the dodo's story may have wondered why I did not quote some of the well-known source material about the subject. For example, Sir Hamon L'Estrange's account in his memoirs:

About 1638, as I walked London streets, I saw the picture of a strange fowle hong out upon a cloth and myselfe with one or two more then in company went in to see it. It was kept in a chamber, and was a great fowle somewhat bigger than the largest Turky Cock, and so legged and footed, but stouter and thicker and of a more erect shape, coloured before like the breast of a young cock fesan, and on the back of dunn or dearc colour. The keeper called it a Dodo, and in the ende of a chymney in the chamber there lay a heape of large pebble stones, whereof hee gave it many in our sight, some as big as nutmegs and the keeper told us that she eats them (conducing to digestion), and though I remember not how far the keeper was questioned therein, yet I am confident that afterwards shee cast them all again.

MY reason for not bringing this up earlier is that this statement almost certainly does *not* refer to the dodo, even though the keeper called the bird by that name. The coloration does not fit the gray Mauritius dodo and certainly not the white Réunion dodo. Nor does the "more erect shape" as compared to the turkey.

As Dr. Hachisuka points out emphatically, this is a description of a bird of the type of the solitary, not of the dodo type. It must have been the use of the name dodo which made earlier researchers accept Sir Hamon's account as one of the dodo and to surmise that this was the specimen which later was in Tradescant's Museum and finally thrown away.

There have always been some descriptions of a bird from Réunion which did not quite "fit."

There was the narrative of a Frenchman named Carré who went to Réunion in 1668: "I saw a kind of bird in this place which I have not found elsewhere: it is that which the inhabitants call the *Oiseau Solitaire,* for, to be sure, it loves solitude and only frequents the most secluded places; one never sees two or more together; it is always alone. It is not unlike a turkey, if it did not have longer legs."

Another very similar description came from the Sieur DuBois

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who arrived in Réunion in 1669. He listed the birds he saw, and when he came to *Solitaires*, he stated: "These birds are so called because they always go alone. They are as big as a large goose and have white plumage with the tips of the wings and tail black. The tail feathers are like those of an ostrich, they have a long neck, and the beak is like that of the Woodcock, but larger; the legs and feet are like those of a turkey."

Carré's and especially DuBois' statements led Strickland to suspect that maybe Réunion had both a dodo and a solitary.

Rothschild, after weighing all the evidence, also said that there must have been two different birds on Réunion, either two kinds of dodos which were quite far apart in appearance, or else one dodo and one solitary resembling the Rodriguez type.

A. C. Oudemans, ten years after Rothschild, took the position that all this was a mistake. The men who reported on them probably were not too observant as regards the moulting stages of the birds. Oudemans' main argument is that nobody described both birds, so to speak, side by side.

This is admittedly sad, yet it so happens that nobody did. But if you read what reports there are, you get the impression that the bird called *solitaire* seems to have been quite numerous, while the white dodo obviously was not. Moreover, Réunion is large enough so that the two birds could have had different habitats.

Somewhat ironically, Prof. Oudemans himself produced evidence for a solitary in addition to the one on Rodriguez.

During the First World War, Prof. Oudemans, vacationing with his wife, looked at the gable stone of a house in Veere, on the island of Walcheren. The stone said that the bird pictured was an ostrich. It also clearly gave the date: 1561. Oudemans did not need long to see that the bird, whatever it was, was not an ostrich. But it could be a dodo. If so, this was the earliest dodo picture on record.

The picture is reproduced here. Prof. Oudemans sent me a print in 1936 when we had correspondence mostly about the Loch Ness animal.

IT must be a gaunt dodo, Oudemans felt, for it certainly could not be a Rodriguez solitary. Leguat had been very specific about its being tailless with a round feather-covered rear end. Look at the tail feathers, Oudemans wrote. Almost like those of an *Afrikaansch struys* (African ostrich) or like those of a dodo.

Well, the answer is that it was not a Rodriguez solitary but a

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Réunion solitary (now called *Ornithaptera solitaria*) and the tail feathers, so prominent on the old Dutch gable stone, are just as prominent in the so-called dodo of Florence, one of the pictures discovered by Dr. S. Killermann. This picture is now taken to portray a male Réunion, while another picture, also discovered by Killermann, shows a female. Comparing this picture with the one of a Rodriguez female by Leguat, one can see how the two birds resembled each other and in what respects they differed.

There is one more picture of the same bird (not reproduced here) which is now at McGill University in Montreal. It is of Italian origin, being picture no. 29 in the so-called "Feather Book" made by Dionisio Minaggio in Milan in 1618. It consists of 156 large pictures with birds, practically all of them hunting scenes.

The interesting point is that the birds are never painted. The real beaks, feet and feathers of birds have been used. Unhappily, the picture of the Réunion solitary is "faked." That is to say that legs and beak have been painted and that the feathers used for the body are those of other birds. But it is undoubtedly the same bird as a dodo of Florence.

That attempts to ship Réunion solitaries to Europe were made is stated by Carré, who says that two of them were caught to be sent to the king (of France) but aboard ship they died of "melancholy." In a few other cases, shipment must have been successful. The 1561 stone masonry in Holland must have had a model. One male must have arrived in Italy around 1618. We do know that there was one on exhibit in London around 1638 and there is evidence that a female got to Vienna in or about 1657.

THE story has a postscript called the dodo of Nazareth or, more learnedly, *Didus nazarenus*.

I thought the case had been nicely cleared up by Iosif Kristianovitch Hamel of the Russian Imperial Academy of Science in St. Petersburg, which published a fairly long study in its Bulletin of the Physical-Mathematical Section in 1848.

Professor Hamel, after reading all the sources, had found a convincing piece of evidence. You remember from last month's column that the Dutch called the dodos *Walghvogels* or "nauseating birds" because their taste was so atrocious. (One of them declared firmly that the dodo was for wonder, not for food.) The French had translated *Walghvogels* correctly into *oiseaux de nausée*. But one François Cauche,

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who spent two weeks on Mauritius in 1638, wrote about the dodos *nous les appellions oiseaux de Nazaret.*

Cauche probably did not try to taste dodo and did not see why the birds should be nauseating, so he thought that the word *nausée* was actually *Nazaret,* which sounds somewhat similar in French. And there was a place called Nazareth nearby on a nautical chart. There still is, but it is now labeled a "bank" while on earlier charts there is an island by that name. Professor Hamel thought this was a simple mistake.

He may be right. But when Prof. Oudemans checked old charts systematically, he found a few in which the name of Nazareth is not placed next to an island where we know that there is no island, but near the existing, if tiny, island which on modern charts appears as Ile Tromelin.

Nobody knows much about Ile Tromelin. It cannot be of any importance because the latest edition of the Admiralty Charts states that its position may be five miles off on the map. If it were of any importance, this would surely have been ascertained by now. Maybe the mapmakers who produced the old charts seen by Oudemans simply lettered Nazareth next to it because there was supposed to be such a place and it was the only island left in the whole area, the other suspected islands having turned into banks and shoals.

But Oudemans said that *Didus nazarenus* cannot be dismissed completely until Ile Tromelin has been carefully investigated. Not that he expected to find live dodos of any kind; he meant subfossil remains like those found on Mauritius and on Rodriguez.

In principle, Oudemans is naturally correct; as long as there is an uninvestigated lead left, the book should not be closed.

No such investigation has taken place. But until it is and the facts prove otherwise, I prefer to accept Prof. Hamel's explanation.

— WILLY LEY

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WOLFBANE

CONCLUSION OF A 2-PART SERIAL

By FREDERIK POHL and C. M. KORNBLUTH

Illustrated by WOOD

There was a chink in the invulnerability of the Pyramids—whoever harvests whatever is ripe is bound to pick something poisonous—but was a Son of the Wolf poisonous enough?

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SYNOPSIS

GLENN Tropile looked like any other Citizen in Earth's tiny, tattered population, but there was a difference. Where Citizens made the best of things, Tropile fought. Where Citizens accommodated their small, restricted lives to a starvation diet and an utter abandonment of hope, Tropile struggled—and won. It was Tropile's nature to win, always. For Tropile was what the beaten remnants of humanity termed: A Son of the Wolf.

ROGET GERMYN, on the other hand, was a most proper Citizen in every way. He was skilled in the Five Gestures and the art of Conversation in Rhymed Couplets; he never said "no," for saying "no" was crude and might hurt someone's feelings; his table manners were exquisite; and he would never, never take advantage of another human being.

Also, like every other Citizen on Earth, he was slowly starving to death. For Earth was no longer the comfortable, warm planet that had spun around old Sol for millions or billions of years. It had been stolen, raped and looted by the curious beings from outer space that the surviving humans knew only as—

THE PYRAMIDS, owners of a wild extrastellar planet that had come into the Solar System and,

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without fuss or struggle, neatly lifted old Earth from its orbit and drawn it away. Why? Humans didn't know. How? Humans had no idea.

All that any man knew about the Pyramids was, first, that there was a single Pyramid on Earth, perched silent and motionless atop Mount Everest; second, that without the Pyramids to rekindle an artificial sun in the skies every five years, humanity would freeze and die—as it was very near to doing anyhow; third, that every once in a while a Citizen, properly Meditating in the ecstasy of concentration which was every Citizen's desire, would disappear — would be Translated, as they called it. That was all they knew, nothing more.

THEY didn't, for example, know that, to the Pyramids, Earth was nothing more than a sort of floating wristwatch mine, from which at certain times Components could be harvested—human Components, living men and women, whose brains could be linked into the Pyramids' planet-sized computers.

But vanquished Earth was not quite dead; Glenn Tropile was not alone. Condemned as a Wolf, threatened with the form of execution called The Donation of the Spinal Tap, Tropile made his escape—and was picked up by another Wolf in the wilderness.

HAENDL was his name. He was not a Citizen; there was no proper courtesy in his manner, no submissive resignation to hunger and cold. Haendl believed in fighting! Nor was he alone; there was a community of Wolves in the ruin of old Princeton University. There they had laboriously reconstructed weapons—guns, tanks, even aircraft. From there, they planned to retake the Earth from its alien masters, the Pyramids.

But—could they?

A mightier, richer Earth had thrown every weapon it owned against the Pyramids when first they came. And the result was nothing.

It was as though the weapons of Man had not existed.

The Pyramids not only were not harmed; they didn't seem to know that the weapons were being used. Tanks, guns, planes—even a hydrogen bomb had spent itself uselessly against the Pyramids!

Troubled, Tropile sat alone, wondering, worrying. He began to fall into a mood of single-minded concentration, began to Meditate, began to think upon the metaphysical questions that were every proper Citizen's first concern . . .

A Component was harvested. Glenn Tropile was Translated — swept up and out to the alien planet that was the home of the Pyramids themselves.

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VIII

HAENDL plodded angrily through the high grass toward the dull throb of the diesel.

Maybe it had been a mistake to take this Glenn Tropile into the colony. He was more Citizen than Wolf—no, cancel that, Haendl thought; he was more Wolf than Citizen. But the Wolf in him was tainted with sheep's blood. He *competed* like a Wolf, but in spite of everything, he refused to give up some of his sheep's ways. Meditation. He had been cautioned against that. But had he given it up?

He had not.

If it had been entirely up to Haendl, Glenn Tropile would have found himself back among the sheep or dead. Fortunately for Tropile, it was not entirely up to Haendl. The community of Wolves was by no means a democracy, but the leader had a certain responsibility to his constituents, and the responsibility was this: He couldn't afford to be wrong. Like the Old Gray Wolf who protected Mowgli, he had to defend his actions against attack; if he failed to defend, the pack would pull him down.

And Innison thought they needed Tropile—not in spite of the taint of the Citizen that he bore, but because of it.

Haendl bawled: "Tropile! Tropile, where are you?" There was only the wind and the *thrum* of the diesel. It was enormously irritating. Haendl had other things to do than to chase after Glenn Tropile. And where was he? There was the diesel, idling wastfully; there the end of the patterned furrows Tropile had plowed. There a small fire, burning—

And there was Tropile.

Haendl stopped, frozen, his mouth opened, about to yell Tropile's name.

It was Tropile, all right, staring with concentrated, oyster-eyed gaze at the fire and the little pot of water it boiled. Staring. Meditating. And over his head, like flawed glass in a pane, was the thing Haendl feared most of all things on Earth. It was an Eye.

Tropile was on the very verge of being Translated . . . whatever that was.

Time, maybe, to find out *what* that was! Haendl ducked back into the shelter of the high grass, knelt, plucked his radio communicator from his pocket, urgently called.

"Innison! Innison, will somebody, for God's sake, put Innison on!"

Seconds passed. Voices answered. Then there was Innison.

"Innison, listen! You wanted to catch Tropile in the act of Meditation? All right, you've got him. The old wheat field, south end,

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under the elms around the creek. Get here fast, Innison—there's an Eye forming above him!"

Luck! Lucky that they were ready for this, and only by luck, because it was the helicopter that Innison had patiently assembled for the attack on Everest that was ready now, loaded with instruments, planned to weigh and measure the aura around the Pyramid —now at hand when they needed it.

That was luck, but there was driving hurry involved, too; it was only a matter of minutes before Haendl heard the wobbling drone of the copter, saw the vanes fluttering low over the hedges, dropping to earth behind the elms.

Haendl raised himself cautiously and peered. Yes, Tropile was still there, and the Eye still above him! But the noise of the helicopter had frayed the spell. Tropile stirred. The Eye wavered and shook –

But did not vanish.

Thanking what passed for his God, Haendl scuttled circuitously around the elms and joined Innison at the copter. Innison was furiously closing switches and pointing lenses.

They saw Tropile sitting there, the Eye growing larger and closer over his head. They had time—plenty of time; oh, nearly a minute of time. They brought to bear on the silent and unknowing form of Glenn Tropile every instrument that the copter carried. They were waiting for Tropile to disappear—

He did.

INNISON and Haendl hunched at the thunderclap as air rushed in to replace him.

"We've got what you wanted," Haendl said harshly. "Let's read some instruments."

Throughout the Translation, high-tensile magnetic tape on a madly spinning drum had been hurtling under twenty-four recording heads at a hundred feet a second. Output to the recording heads had been from every kind of measuring device they had been able to conceive and build, all loaded on the helicopter for use on Mount Everest—all now pointed directly at Glenn Tropile.

They had, for the instant of Translation, readings from one microsecond to the next on the varying electric, gravitational, magnetic, radiant and molecular-state conditions in his vicinity.

They got back to Innison's workshop, and the laboratory inside it, in less than a minute; but it took hours of playing back the magnetic pulses into machines that turned them into scribed curves on coordinate paper before Innison had anything resembling an answer.

He said: "No mystery. I mean no mystery except the speed. Want

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to know what happened to Tropile?"

"I do," said Raendl.

"A pencil of electrostatic force maintained by a pinch effect bounced down the approximate azimuth of Everest—God knows how they handled the elevation—and charged him and the area positive. A *big* charge, clear off the scale. They parted company. He was bounced straight up. A meter off the ground, a correcting vector was applied. When last seen, he was headed fast in the direction of the Pyramids' binary—fast! So fast that I would guess he'll get there alive. It takes an appreciable time, a good part of a second, for his protein to coagulate enough to make him sick and then kill him. If the Pyramids strip the charges off him immediately on arrival, as I should think they will, he'll live."

"Friction—"

"Be damned to friction," Innison said calmly. "He carried a packet of air with him and there *was* no friction. How? I don't know. How are they going to keep him alive in space, without the charges that hold air? I don't know. If they don't maintain the charges, can they beat the speed of light? I don't know. I can tell you *what* happened. I can't tell you *how*."

Haendl stood up thoughtfully. "It's something," he said grudgingly.

"It's more than we've ever had—a complete reading at the instant of Translation!"

"We'll get more," Haendl promised. "Innison, now that you know what to look for, go on looking for it. Keep every possible detection device monitored twenty-four hours a day. Turn on everything you've got that'll find a sign of imposed modulation. At any sign—or at anybody's hunch that there *might* be a sign—I'm to be called. If I'm eating. If I'm sleeping. If I'm enjoying with a woman. Call me, you hear? Maybe you were right about Tropile; maybe he did have some use. He might give the Pyramids a bellyache."

Innison, flipping the magnetic tape drum to rewind, said thoughtfully: "It's too bad they've got him. We could have used some more readings."

"Too bad?" Haendl laughed sharply. "This time they've got themselves a Wolf."

THE Pyramids did have a Wolf—a fact which did not matter in the least to them.

It is not possible to know what "mattered" to a Pyramid except by inference. But it is possible to know that they had no way of telling Wolf from Citizen.

The planet which was their home—Earth's old Moon—was small, dark, atmosphereless and waterless. It was completely built

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over, much of it with its propulsion devices.

In the old days, when technology had followed war, luxury, government and leisure, the Pyramids' sun had run out of steam; and at about the same time, they had run out of the Components they imported from a neighboring planet. They used the last of their Components to implement their stolid metaphysic of hauling and pushing. They pushed their planet.

They knew where to push it.

Each Pyramid as it stood was a radio-astronomy observatory, powerful and accurate beyond the wildest dreams of Earthly radio-astronomers. From this start, they built instruments to aid their naked senses. They went into a kind of hibernation, reducing their activity to a bare trickle except for a small "crew" and headed for Earth. They had every reason to believe they would find more Components there, and they did.

Tropile was one of them. The only thing which set him apart from the others was that he was the most recent to be stockpiled.

The religion, or vice, or philosophy he practiced made it possible for him to be a Component. Meditation derived from Zen Buddhism was a windfall for the Pyramids, though, of course, they had no idea at all of what lay behind it and did not "care." They knew only that, at certain times, certain potential Components became Components which were no longer merely potential—which were, in fact, ripe for harvesting.

It was useful to them that the minds they cropped were utterly blank. It saved the trouble of blanking them.

Tropile had been harvested at the moment his inhibiting conscious mind had been cleared, for the Pyramids were not interested in him as an entity capable of will and conception. They used only the raw capacity of the human brain and its perceptors.

They used Rashevsky's Number, the gigantic, far more than astronomical expression that denoted the number of switching operations performable within the human brain. They used "subception," the phenomenon by which the reasoning mind, uninhibited by consciousness, reacts directly to stimuli—shortcutting the cerebral censor, avoiding the weighing of shall-I-or-shan't-I that precedes every conscious act.

The harvested minds were—Components.

It is not desirable that your bedroom wall switch have a mind of its own; if you turn the lights on, you want them *on*. So it was with the Pyramids.

A Component was needed in the industrial complex which transformed catabolism products into anabolism products.

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WITH long experience gained since their planetfall, Pyramids received the *tabula rasa* that was Glenn Tropile. He arrived in one piece, wearing a blanket of air. Quick-frozen mentally at the moment of inert blankness his Meditation had granted him—the psychic drunkard's coma—he was cushioned on repellent charges as he plummeted down, and instantly stripped of surplus electrostatic charge.

At this point, he was still human; only asleep.

He remained "asleep." Annular fields they used for lifting and lowering seized him and moved him into a snug tank of nutrient fluid. There were many such tanks, ready and waiting.

The tanks themselves could be moved, and the one containing Glenn Tropile did move, to a metabolism complex where there were many other tanks, all occupied. This was a warm room—the Pyramids had wasted no energy on such foppish comforts in the first "room." In this room, Glenn Tropile gradually resumed the appearance of life. His heart once again began to beat. Faint stirrings were visible in his chest as his habit-numbed lungs attempted to breathe. Gradually the stirrings slowed and stopped. There was no need for that foppish comfort, either; the nutrient fluid supplied all.

Tropile was "wired into circuit."

The only literal wiring, at first, was a temporary one—a fine electrode aseptically introduced into the great nerve that leads to the rhinencephalon—the "small brain," the area of the brain which contains the pleasure centers that motivate human behavior.

More than a thousand Components had been spoiled and discarded before the Pyramids had located the pleasure centers so exactly.

While the Component, Tropile, was being "programmed," the wire rewarded him with minute pulses that made his body glow with animal satisfaction when he functioned correctly. That was all there was to it. After a time, the wire was withdrawn, but by then Tropile had "learned" his entire task. Conditioned reflexes had been established. They could be counted on for the long and useful life of the Component.

That life might be very long indeed; in the nutrient tank beside Tropile's, as it happened, lay a Component with eight legs and a chitinous fringe around its eyes. It had lain in such a tank for more than a hundred and twenty-five thousand Terrestrial years.

THE Component was placed in operation. It opened its eyes and saw things. The sensory nerves of its limbs felt things. The muscles

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of its hands and toes operated things.

Where was Glenn Tropile?

He was there, all of him, but a zombie-Tropile. Bereft of will, emptied of memories. He was a machine and part of a huger machine. His sex was the sex of a photoelectric cell; his politics were those of a transistor; his ambition that of a mercury switch. He didn't know anything about sex, or fear, or hope. He only knew two things: Input and Output.

Input to him was a display of small lights on a board before his vacant face; and also the modulation of a loudspeaker's liquid-borne hum in each ear.

Output from him was the dancing manipulation of certain buttons and keys, prompted by changes in Input and by nothing else.

Between Input and Output, he lay in the tank, a human Black Box which was capable of Rashevsky's Number of switchings, and of nothing else.

He had been programmed to accomplish a specific task—to shepherd a chemical called 3, 7, 12-trihydroxycholanic acid, present in the catabolic product of the Pyramids, through a succession of more than five hundred separate operations until it emerged as the chemical, which the Pyramids were able to metabolize, called Protoporphin IX.

He was not the only Component operating in this task; there were several, each with its own program.

The acid accumulated in great tanks a mile from him. He knew its concentration, heat and pressure; he knew of all the impurities which would affect subsequent reactions. His fingers tapped, giving binary-coded signals to sluice gates to open for so many seconds and then to close; for such an amount of solvent at such a temperature to flow in; for the agitators to agitate for just so long at just such a force. And if a trouble signal disturbed any one of the 517 major and minor operations, he—it?—was set to decide among alternatives:

—scrap the batch in view of flow conditions along the line?

—isolate and bypass the batch through a standby loop?

—immediate action to correct the malfunction?

Without inhibiting intelligence, without the trammels of humanity on him, the intricate display board and the complex modulations of the two sound signals could be instantly taken in, evaluated and given their share in the decision.

Was it—he?—still alive?

The question has no meaning. It was working. It was an excellent machine, in fact, and the Pyramids cared for it well. Its only consciousness, apart from the reflexive responses that were its program,

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was—well, call it "the sound of one hand alone." Which is to say zero, mindlessness, Samadhi, stupor.

It continued to function for some time—until the required supply of Protoporphin IX had been exceeded by a sufficient factor of safety to make further processing unnecessary—that is, for some minutes or months. During that time, it was Happy. (It had been programmed to be Happy when there were no uncorrected malfunctions of the process.) At the end of that time, it shut itself off, sent out a signal that the task was completed, then it was laid aside in the analogue of a deep-freeze, to be reprogrammed when another Component was needed.

It was totally immaterial to the Pyramids that this particular Component had not been stamped from Citizen but from Wolf.

IX

ROGET Germyn, of Wheeling a Citizen, contemplated his wife with growing concern.

Possibly the events of the past few days had unhinged her reason, but he was nearly sure that she had eaten a portion of the evening meal secretly, in the serving room, before calling him to the table.

He felt positive that it was only a temporary aberration; she was, after all, a Citizeness, with all that that implied. A—a creature—like that Gala Tropile, for example—someone like that might steal extra portions with craft and guile. You couldn't live with a Wolf for years and not have some of it rub off on you. But not Citizeness Germyn.

There was a light, thrice-repeated tap on the door.

Speak of the devil, thought Roget Germyn most appropriately; for it was that same Gala Tropile. She entered, her head downcast, looking worn and—well, pretty.

He began formally: "I give you greeting, Citi—"

"They're here!" she interrupted in desperate haste. Germyn blinked. "Please," she begged, "can't you do something? They're *Wolves!*"

Citizeness Germyn emitted a muted shriek.

"You may leave, Citizeness," Germyn told her shortly, already forming in his mind the words of gentle reproof he would later use. "Now what is all this talk of Wolves?"

Gala Tropile distractedly sat in the chair her hostess had vacated. "We were running away," she babbled. "Glenn—he was Wolf, you see, and he made me leave with him, after the House of the Five Regulations. We were a day's long march from Wheeling and we stopped to rest. And there was an aircraft, Citizen!"

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"An aircraft!" Citizen Germyn allowed himself a frown. "Citizeness, it is not well to invent things which are not so."

"I saw it, Citizen! There were men in it. One of them is here again! He came looking for me with another man and I barely escaped him. I'm afraid!"

"There is no cause for fear, only an opportunity to appreciate," Citizen Germyn said mechanically—it was what one told one's children.

But within himself, he was finding it very hard to remain calm. That word Wolf—it was a destroyer of calm, an incitement to panic and hatred! He remembered Tropile well, and there was Wolf, to be sure. The mere fact that Citizen Germyn had doubted his Wolfishness at first was powerful cause to be doubly convinced of it now; he had postponed the day of reckoning for an enemy of all the world, and there was enough secret guilt in his recollection to set his own heart thumping.

"Tell me exactly what happened," said Citizen Germyn, in words that the stress of emotion had already made far less than graceful.

Obediently, Gala Tropile said: "I was returning to my home after the evening meal and Citizeness Puffin—she took me in after Citizen Tropile—after my husband was—"

"I understand. You made your home with her."

"Yes. She told me that two men had come to see me. They spoke badly, she said, and I was alarmed. I peered through a window of my home and they were there. One had been in the aircraft I saw! And they flew away with my husband."

"It is a matter of seriousness," Citizen Germyn admitted doubtfully. "So then you came here to me?"

"Yes, but they saw me, Citizen! And I think they followed. You must protect me—I have no one else!"

"If they be Wolf," Germyn said calmly, "we will raise hue and cry against them. Now will the Citizeness remain here? I go forth to see these men."

There was a graceless hammering on the door.

"Too late!" cried Gala Tropile in panic. "They are here!"

CITIZEN Germyn went through the ritual of greeting, of deprecating the ugliness and poverty of his home, of offering everything he owned to his visitors; it was the way to greet a stranger.

The two men lacked both courtesy and wit, but they did make an attempt to comply with the minimal formal customs of introduction. He had to give them credit for that; and yet it was al-

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most more alarming than if they had blustered and yelled.

For he knew one of these men.

He dredged the name out of his memory. It was Haendl. The same man had appeared in Wheeling the day Glenn Tropile had been scheduled to make the Donation of the Spinal Tap—and had broken free and escaped. He had inquired about Tropile of a good many people, Citizen Germyn included, and even at that time, in the excitement of an Amok, a Wolf-finding and a Translation in a single day, Germyn had wondered at Haendl's lack of breeding and airs.

Now he wondered no longer.

But the man made no overt act and Citizen Germyn postponed the raising of the hue and cry. It was not a thing to be done lightly.

"Gala Tropile is in this house," the man with Haendl said bluntly.

Citizen Germyn managed a Quirked Smile.

"We want to see her, Germyn. It's about her husband. He—uh—he was with us for a while and something happened."

"Ah, yes. The Wolf."

The man flushed and looked at Haendl. Haendl said loudly: "The Wolf. Sure he's a Wolf. But he's gone now, so you don't have to worry about that."

"Gone?"

"Not just him, but four or five of us. There was a man named Innison and he's gone, too. We need help, Germyn. Something about Tropile—God knows how it is, but he started something. We want to talk to his wife and find out what we can about him. So will you get her out of the back room where she's hiding and bring her here, please?"

Citizen Germyn quivered. He bent over the ID bracelet that once had belonged to the one PFC Joe Hartman, fingering it to hide his thoughts.

He said at last: "Perhaps you are right. Perhaps the Citizeness is with my wife. If this be so, would it not be possible that she is fearful of those who once were with her husband?"

HAENDL laughed sourly. "She isn't any more fearful than we are, Germyn. I told you about this man Innison who disappeared. He was a Son of the Wolf, you understand me? For that matter—" He glanced at his companion, licked his lips and changed his mind about what he had been going to say next. "He was a Wolf. Do you ever remember hearing of a Wolf being Translated before?"

"Translated?" Germyn dropped the ID bracelet. "But that's impossible!" he cried, forgetting his manners completely. "Oh, no! Translation comes only to those who attain the moment of supreme detachment, you can be sure of

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that. I *know!* I've seen it with my own eyes. No Wolf could *possilly*—"

"At least five Wolves did," Haendl said grimly. "Now you see what the trouble is? Tropile was Translated—I saw that with *my* own eyes. The next day, Innison. Within a week, two or three others. So we came down here, Germyn, not because we like you people, not because we enjoy it, but because we're *scared.*

"What we want is to talk to Tropile's wife—you, too, I guess; we want to talk to anybody who ever knew him. We want to find out everything there is to find out about Tropile and see if we can make any sense of the answers. Because maybe Translation is the supreme objective of life to you people, Germyn, but to us it's just one more way of dying. And we don't want to die."

Citizen Germyn bent to pick up his cherished identification bracelet and dropped it absently on a table. There was very much on his mind.

He said at last: "That is strange. Shall I tell you another strange thing?"

Haendl, looking angry and baffled, nodded.

Germyn said: "There has been no Translation here since the day the Wolf, Tropile, escaped. But there have been Eyes. I have seen them myself. It—" He hesitated, shrugged. "It has been disturbing. Some of our finest Citizens have ceased to Meditate; they have been worrying. So many Eyes and nobody taken! It is outside of all of our experience, and our customs have suffered. Politeness is dwindling among us. Even in my own household—"

He coughed and went on: "No matter. But these Eyes have come into every home; they have peered about, peered about, and no one has been taken. Why? Is it something to do with the Translation of Wolves?" He stared hopelessly at his visitors. "All I know is that it is very strange and therefore I am worried."

"Then take us to Gala Tropile," said Haendl. "Let's see what we can find out!"

Citizen Germyn bowed. He cleared his throat and raised his voice just sufficiently to carry from one room to another. "Citizeness!" he called.

There was a pause and then his wife appeared in the doorway, looking ruffled and ill at ease with her guest.

"Will you ask if Citizeness Tropile will join us here?" he requested.

His wife nodded. "She is resting. I will call her."

They called her and questioned her for some time.

She told them nothing.

She had nothing to tell.

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X

ON Earth's binary, Glenn Tropile had been reprogrammed for a new task.

The problem was navigation. Earth had been a disappointment to the Pyramids; it was necessary to move rapidly to a more rewarding planet.

The Pyramids had taken Earth out past Pluto's orbit with a simple shove, slow and massive. It had been enough merely to approximate the direction in which they would want to go. There would be plenty of time for refinements of course later.

But now the time for refinements had come, earlier than they might have expected. They had now time to travel, they knew where to—a star cluster reasonably sure to be rich in Componentiferous planets. It was inherent in the nature of Component mines that eventually they always played out.

There were always more mines, though. If that had not been so, it would have been necessary, perhaps, to stock-breed Components against future needs. But it was easier to work the vein out and move on.

Now the course had to be computed. There were such variables to be considered as: motion of the star cluster; acceleration of the binary-planet system; *gravitational influence of every astronomical object in the island universe, without exception.*

Precise computation on this basis was obviously not practical. That was not an answer to the problem, since the time required would approach eternity as one of its parameters.

It was possible to simplify the problem. Only the astronomical bodies which were relatively nearby need be treated as individuals. Farther away, the Pyramids began to group them in small bunches, still farther in large bunches, on to the point where the farthest — and the most numerous—bodies were lumped together as a vague gravitational "noise" whose average intensity alone it was required to know and to enter as a datum.

And still no single Component could handle even its own share of the problem, were the "computer" they formed to be kept within the range of permissible size.

It was for this that the Component which had once been Tropile was taken out of storage.

This was all old stuff to the Pyramids; they knew how to handle it. They broke the problem down to its essentials, separated even those into many parts. There was, for example, the subsection of one certain aspect of the logistical problem which involved lo-

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cating and procuring additional Components to handle the load.

Even that tiny specialization was too much for a single Component, but fortunately the Pyramids had resources to bring to bear. The procedure in such cases was to hitch several Components together.

This was done.

When the Pyramids finished their neuro-surgery, there floated in an oversized nutrient tank a thing like a great sea-anemone. It was composed of eight Components—all human, as it happened—arranged in a circle, facing inward, joined temple to temple, brain to brain.

At their feet, where sixteen eyes could see it, was the display board to feed them their Input. Sixteen hands each grasped a molded switch to handle their binary-coded Output. There would be no storage of the Output outside of the eight-Component complex itself; it went as control signals to the electrostatic generators, funneled through the single Pyramid on Mount Everest, which handled the task of Component-procurement.

That is, of Translation.

The programming was slow and thorough. Perhaps the Pyramid which finally activated the octuple unit and went away was pleased with itself, not knowing that one of its Components was Glenn Tropile.

NIRVANA. (It pervaded all; there was nothing outside of it.)

Nirvana. (Glenn Tropile floated in it as in the amniotic fluid around him.)

Nirvana. (The sound of one hand . . . Floating oneness.)

There was an intrusion.

Perfection is completed; by adding to it, it is destroyed. *Duality struck like a thunderbolt. Oneness shattered.*

For Glenn Tropile, it seemed as though his wife were screaming at him to wake up. He tried to.

It was curiously difficult and painful. Timeless poignant sadness, five years of sorrow over a lost love compressed into a microsecond. It was always so, Tropile thought drowsily, awakening. It never lasts. What's the use of worrying over what always happens . . .

Sudden shock and horror rocked him.

This was no ordinary awakening— no ordinary thing at all—*nothing* was as it ever had been before!

Tropile opened his mouth and screamed—or thought he did. But there was only a hoarse, faint flutter in his eardrums.

It was a moment when sanity might have gone. But there was one curious, mundane fact that saved him. He was holding something in his hands. He found that

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he could look at it, and it was a switch. A molded switch, mounted on a board, and he was holding one in each hand.

It was little to cling to, but it at least was real. If his hands could be holding something, then there must be some reality somewhere.

Tropile closed his eyes and managed to open them again. Yes, there was reality, too. He closed his eyes and light stopped. He opened them and light returned.

Then perhaps he was not dead, as he had thought.

Carefully, stumbling—his mind his only usable tool—he tried to make an estimate of his surroundings.

He could hardly believe what he found.

Item: he could scarcely move. Somehow he was bound by his feet and his head. How? He couldn't tell.

Item: he was bent over and he couldn't straighten. Why? Again he couldn't tell, but it was a fact. The great erecting muscles of his back answered his command, but his body would not move.

Item: his eyes saw, but only in a small area.

He couldn't move his head, either. Still, he could see a few things. The switch in his hand, his feet, a sort of display of lights on a strangely circular board.

The lights flickered and changed their pattern.

WITHOUT thinking, he moved a switch. Why? Because it was *right* to move that switch. When a certain light flared green, a certain switch had to be thrown. Why? Well, when a certain light flared green, a certain switch—

He abandoned that problem. Never mind why; what the devil was going *on?*

Glenn Tropile squinted about him like a mollusc peering out of its shell. There was another fact, the oddness of the seeing. What makes it look so queer, he asked himself.

He found an answer, but it required some time to take it in. He was seeing in a strange perspective. One looks out of two eyes. Close one eye and the world is flat. Open it again and there is a stereoscopic double; the saliencies of the picture leap forward, the background retreats.

So with the lights on the board —no, not exactly; but something *like* that, he thought. It was as though—he squinted and strained —well, as though he had never really *seen* before. As though for all his life he had had only one eye, and now he had strangely been given two.

His visual perception of the board was *total.* He could see all of it at once. It had no "front" or "back." It was in the round. The natural thinking of it was without orientation. He engulfed and com-

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prehended it as a unit. It had no secrets of shadow or silhouette.

I think, Tropile mouthed slowly to himself, that I'm going crazy.

But that was no explanation, either. Mere insanity didn't account for what he saw.

Then, he asked himself, was he in a state that was *beyond* Nirvana? He remembered, with an odd flash of guilt, that he had been Meditating, watching the stages of boiling water. All right, perhaps he had been Translated. But what was this, then? Were the Meditators wrong in teaching that Nirvana was the end—and yet righter than the Wolves, who dismissed Meditation as a phenomenon wholly inside the skull and refused to discuss Translation at all?

That was a question for which he could find nothing approaching an answer. He turned away from it and looked at his hands.

He could see them, too, in the round, he noted. He could see every wrinkle and pore in all sixteen of them . . .

Sixteen hands!

THAT was the other moment when sanity might have gone. He closed his eyes. (Sixteen eyes! No wonder the total perception!) And, after a while, he opened them again.

The hands were there. All sixteen of them.

Cautiously, Tropile selected a finger that seemed familiar in his memory. After a moment's thought, he flexed it. It bent. He selected another. Another—on a different hand this time.

He could use any or all of the sixteen hands. They were all his, all sixteen of them.

I appear, thought Tropile crazily, to be a sort of eight-branched snowflake. Each of my branches is a human body.

He stirred, and added another datum: I appear also to be in a tank of fluid and yet I do not drown.

There were certain deductions to be made from that. Either someone — the Pyramids? — had done something to his lungs, or else the fluid was as good an oxygenating medium as air. Or both.

Suddenly a burst of data-lights twinkled on the board below him. Instantly and involuntarily, his sixteen hands began working the switches, transmitting complex directions in a lightninglike stream of on-off clicks.

Tropile relaxed and let it happen. He had no choice; the power that made it *right* to respond to the board made it impossible for his brain to concentrate while the response was going on. Perhaps, he thought drowsily, he would never have awakened at all if it had not been for the long period with no lights . . .

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But he was awake. And his consciousness began to explore as the task ended.

He had had an opportunity to understand something of what was happening. He understood that he was now a part of something larger than himself, beyond doubt something which served and belonged to the Pyramids. His single brain not being large enough for the job, seven others had been hooked in with it.

But where were their personalities?

Gone, he supposed; presumably they had been Citizens. Sons of the Wolf did not Meditate and therefore were not Translated—except for himself, he corrected wryly, remembering the Meditation on Rainclouds that had led him to—

No, wait!

Not Rainclouds but Water!

TROPILE caught hold of himself and forced his mind to retrace that thought. He *remembered* the Raincloud Meditation. It had been prompted by a particularly noble cumulus of the Ancient Ship type.

And this was odd. Tropile had never been deeply interested in Rainclouds, had never known even the secondary classifications of Raincloud types. And he *knew* that the Ancient Ship was of the fourth order of categories.

It was a false memory.

It was not his.

Therefore, logically, it was someone else's memory; and being available to his own mind, as the fourteen other hands and eyes were available, it must belong to —another branch of the snowflake.

He turned his eyes down and tried to see which of the branches was his old body. He found it quickly, with growing excitement. There was the left great toe of his body. He had injured it in boyhood and there was no mistaking the way it was bent. Good! It was reassuring.

He tried to feel the one particular body that led to that familiar toe.

He succeeded, though not easily. After a time, he became more aware of *that* body—somewhat as conscious" or "heart conscious." a neurotic may become "stomach But this was no neurosis; it was an intentional exploration.

Since that worked, with some uneasiness he transferred his attention to another pair of feet and "thought" his way up from them.

It was embarrassing.

For the first time in his life, he knew what it felt like to have breasts. For the first time in his life, he knew what it was like to have one's internal organs quite differently shaped and arranged, buttressed and stressed by different muscles. The very faint background feel of man's internal

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arrangements, never questioned unless something goes wrong with them and they start to hurt, was not at all like the faint background feel that a woman has inside her.

And when he concentrated on that feel, it was no faint background to him. It was surprising and upsetting.

He withdrew his attention—hoping that he would be able to. Gratefully, he became conscious of his own body again. He was still *himself* if he chose to be.

Were the other seven still themselves?

He reached into his mind—all of it, all eight separate intelligences that were combined within him.

"Is anybody there?" he demanded.

No answer—or nothing he could recognize as an answer. He drove harder and there still was none. It was annoying. He resented it as bitterly, he remembered, as in the old days when he had first been learning the subtleties of Ruin Appreciation. There had been a Ruin Master, his name forgotten, who had been sometimes less than courteous, had driven hard—

Another false memory!

He withdrew and weighed it. Perhaps, he thought, that was a part of the answer. These people, these other seven, would not be driven. The attempt to call them back to consciousness would have to be delicate. When he drove hard, it was painful—he remembered the instant violent agony of his own awakening—and they reacted with anguish.

MORE gently, alert for vagrant "memories," he combed the depths of the eightfold mind within him, reaching into the sleeping portions, touching, handling, sifting and associating, sorting. This memory of an old knife wound from an Amok—that was not the Raincloud woman; it was a man, very aged. This faint recollection of a childhood fear of drowning—was that she? It was; it fitted with this other recollection, the long detour on the road south toward the sun, around a river.

The Raincloud woman was the first to round out in his mind, and the first he communicated with. He was not surprised to find that, early in her life, she had feared that she might be Wolf.

He reached out for her. It was almost magic—knowing the "secret name" of a person, so that then he was yours to command. But the "secret name" was more than that. It was the gestalt of the person. It was the sum of all data and experience, never available to another person—until now.

With her memories arranged at last in his own mind, he thouhgt persuasively: "Citizeness Alla Narova, will you awaken and speak with me?"

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No answer — only a vague, troubled stirring.

Gently he persisted: "I know you well, Alla Narova. You sometimes thought you might be a Daughter of the Wolf, but never really believed it because you knew you loved your husband—and thought Wolves did not love. you loved Rainclouds, too. It was when you stood at Beachy Head and saw a great cumulus that you went into Meditation—"

And on and on, many times, coaxingly. Even so, it was not easy; but at last he began to reach her. Slowly she began to surface. Thoughts faintly sounded in his mind, like echoes at first, his own thoughts bouncing back at him, a sort of mental nod of agreement: "Yes, that is so." Then—terror. With a shaking fear, a hysterical rush, Citizeness Alla Narova came violently up to full consciousness and to panic.

She was soundlessly screaming. The whole eight-branched figure quivered and twisted in its nutrient bath.

The terrible storm raged in Tropile's own mind as fully as in hers—but he had the advantage of knowing what it was. He helped her. He fought it for the two of them . . . soothing, explaining, calming.

At last her branch of the snowflake-body retreated, sobbing for a spell. The storm was over.

He talked to her in his mind and she "listened." She was incredulous, but there was no choice for her; she *had* to believe.

Exhausted and passive, she asked finally: "What can we do? I wish I were dead!"

He told her: "You were never a coward before. Remember, Alla Narova, I *know* you as nobody has ever known another human being before. That's the way you will know me. As for what we can do—we must begin by waking the others, if we can."

"If not?"

"If not," Tropile replied grimly, "then we will think of something else."

She was of tough stuff, he thought admiringly. When she had rested and absorbed things, her spirit was almost that of a Wolf; she had very nearly been right about herself.

Together they explored their twinned members. They found through them exactly what task was theirs to do. They found how the electrostatic harvesting scythe of the Pyramids was controlled, by and through them. They found what limitations there were and what freedoms they owned. They reached into the other petals of the snowflake, reached past the linked Components into the whole complex of electrostatic field generators and propulsion machinery, reached even past that into—

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Into the great single function of the Pyramids that lay beyond.

XI

HAENDL was on the ragged edge of breakdown, which was something new in his life.

It was full hot summer and the hidden colony of Wolves in Princeton should have been full of energy and life. The crops were growing on all the fields nearby; the drained storehouses were being replenished.

The aircraft that had been so painfully rebuilt and fitted for the assault on Mount Everest were standing by, ready to be manned and to take off.

And nothing, absolutely nothing, was going right.

It looked as though there would *be* no expedition to Everest. Four times now, Haendl had gathered his forces and been all ready. Four times, a key man of the expedition had—vanished.

Wolves didn't vanish!

And yet more than a score of them had. First Tropile—then Innison—then two dozen more, by ones and twos. No one was immune. Take Innison, for example. There was a man who was Wolf through and through. He was a doer, not a thinker; his skills were the skills of an artisan, a tinkerer, a jackleg mechanic. How could a man like that succumb to the pallid lure of Meditation?

But undeniably he had.

It had reached a point where Haendl himself was red-eyed and jumpy. He had set curious alarms for himself — had enlisted the help of others of the colony to avert the danger of Translation from himself.

When he went to bed at night, a lieutenant sat next to his bed, watchfully alert lest Haendl, in that moment of reverie before sleep, fell into Meditation and himself be Translated. There was no hour of the day when Haendl permitted himself to be alone; and his companions, or guards, were ordered to shake him awake, as violently as need be, at the first hint of an abstracted look in the eyes or a reflective cast of the features.

As time went on, Haendl's self-imposed regime of constant alertness began to cost him heavily in lost rest and sleep. And the consequences of that were—more and more occasions when the bodyguards shook him awake; less and less rest.

He was very close to breakdown indeed.

On a hot, wet morning a few days after his useless expedition to see Citizen Germyn in Wheeling, Haendl ate a tasteless breakfast and, reeling with fatigue, set out on a tour of inspection of Princeton. Warm rain dripped from low

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clouds, but that was merely one more annoyance to Haendl. He hardly noticed it.

There were upward of a thousand Wolves in the Community and there were signs of worry on the face of every one of them. Haendl was not the only man in Princeton who had begun laying traps for himself as a result of the unprecedented disappearances; he was not the only one who was short of sleep. When one member in forty disappears, the morale of the whole community receives a shattering blow.

To Haendl, it was clear, looking into the faces of his compatriots, that not only was it going to be nearly impossible to mount the planned assault on the Pyramid on Everest this year, it was going to be unbearably difficult merely to keep the community going.

The whole Wolf pack was on the verge of panic.

THERE was a confused shouting behind Haendl. Groggily he turned and looked; half a dozen Wolves were yelling and pointing at something in the wet, muggy air.

It was an Eye, hanging silent and featureless over the center of the street.

Haendl took a deep breath and mustered command of himself. "Frampton!" he ordered one of his lieutenants. "Get the helicopter with the instruments here. We'll take some more readings."

Frampton opened his mouth, then looked more closely at Haendl and, instead, began to talk on his pocket radio. Haendl knew what was in the man's mind—it was in his own, too.

What was the use of more readings? From the time of Tropile's Translation on, they had had a superfluity of instrument readings on the forces and auras that surrounded the Eyes—yes, and on Translations themselves, too. Before Tropile, there had never been an Eye seen in Princeton, much less an actual Translation. But things were different now. Everything was different. Eyes roamed restlessly around day and night.

Some of the men nearest the Eye were picking up rocks and throwing them at the bobbing vortex in the air. Haendl started to yell at them to stop, then changed his mind. The Eye didn't seem to be affected—as he watched, one of the men scored a direct hit with a cobblestone. The stone went right through the Eye, without sound or effect; why not let them work off some of their fears in direct action?

There was a fluttering of vanes and the copter with the instruments mounted on it came down in the middle of the street, between Haendl and the Eye.

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It was all very rapid from then on.

The Eye swooped toward Haendl. He couldn't help it; he ducked. That was useless, but it was also unnecessary, for he saw in a second that it was only partly the motion of the Eye toward him that made it loom larger; it was also that the Eye itself was growing.

An Eye was perhaps the size of a football, as near as anyone could judge. This one got bigger, bigger. It was the size of a roc's egg, the size of a whale's blunt head. It stopped and hovered over the helicopter, while the man inside frantically pointed lenses and meters—

Thundercrash.

Not a man this time—Translation had gone beyond men. The whole helicopter vanished, man, instruments, spinning vanes and all.

Haendl picked himself up, sweating, shocked beyond sleepiness.

The young man named Frampton said fearfully: "Haendl, what do we do now?"

"Do?" Haendl stared at him absently. "Why, kill ourselves, I guess."

He nodded soberly, as though he had at last attained the solution of a difficult problem. Then he sighed.

"Well, one thing before that," he said. "I'm going to Wheeling. We Wolves are licked; maybe the Citizens can help us now."

ROGET Germyn, of Wheeling, a Citizen, received the message in the chambers that served him as a place of business. He had a visitor waiting for him at home.

Germyn was still Citizen and he could not quickly break off the pleasant and interminable discussion he was having with a prospective client over a potential business arrangement. He apologized for the interruption caused by the message the conventional five times, listened while his guest explained once more the plan he had come to propose in full, then turned his cupped hands toward himself in the gesture of Denial of Adequacy. It was the closest he could come to saying no.

On the other side of the desk, the Citizen who had come to propose an investment scheme immediately changed the subject by inviting Germyn and his Citizeness to a Sirius Viewing, the invitation in the form of rhymed couplets. He had wanted to transact his business very much, but he couldn't *insist*.

Germyn got out of the invitation by a Conditional Acceptance in proper form, and the man left, delayed only slightly by the Four Urgings to Stay. Almost immediately, Germyn dismissed his clerk and closed his office for the

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day by tying a triple knot in a length of red cord across the open door.

When he got to his home, he found, as he had suspected, that the visitor was Haendl.

There was much doubt in Citizen Germyn's mind about Haendl. The man had nearly admitted to being Wolf, and how could a citizen overlook that? But in the excitement of Gala Tropile's Translation, there had been no hue and cry. Germyn had permitted the man to leave. And now?

He reserved judgment. He found Haendl distastefully sipping tea in the living room and attempting to keep up a formal conversation with Citizeness Germyn. He rescued him, took him aside, closed a door—and waited.

He was astonished at the change in the man. Before, Haendl had been bouncy, aggressive, quick-moving—the very qualities least desired in a Citizen, the mark of the Son of the Wolf. Now he was none of these things, but he looked no more like a Citizen for all that; he has haggard, tense.

He said, with an absolute minimum of protocol: "Germyn, the last time I saw you, there was a Translation. Gala Tropile, remember?"

"I remember," Citizen Germyn said. Remember! It had hardly left his thoughts.

"And you told me there had been others. Are they still going on?"

GERMYN said: "There have been others." He was trying to speak directly, to match this man Haendl's speed and forcefulness. It was hardly good manners, but it had occurred to Citizen Germyn that there were times when manners, after all, were not the most important thing in the world. "There were two in the past few days. One was a woman—Citizeness Baird; her husband's a teacher. She was Viewing Through Glass with four or five other women at the time. She just—disappeared. She was looking through a green prism at the time, if that helps."

"I don't know if it helps or not. Who was the other one?"

Germyn shrugged. "A man named Harmane. No one saw it. But they heard the thunderclap, or something like a thunderclap, and he was missing." He thought for a moment. "It is a little unusual, I suppose. Two in a week—"

Haendl said roughly: "Listen, Germyn. It isn't just two. In the past thirty days, within the area around here and in *one other place,* there have been at least fifty. In *two* places, do you understand? Here and in Princeton. The rest of the world—nothing much; a few Translations here and there. But just in these two communities, fifty. Does that make sense?"

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Citizen Germyn thought. "—No."

"No. And I'll tell you something else. Three of the—well, victims have been children under the age of five. One was too young to walk. And the most recent Translation wasn't a person at all. It was a helicopter. Now figure that out, Germyn. What's the explanation for Translations?"

Germyn was gaping. "Why—you Meditate, you know. On Connectivity. The idea is that once you've grasped the Essential Connectivity of All Things, you become One with the Cosmic Whole. But I don't see how a baby or a machine—"

"No, of course you don't. Remember Glenn Tropile?"

"Naturally."

"He's the link," Haendl said grimly. "When he got Translated, we thought it was a big help, because he had the consideration to do it right under our eyes. We got enough readings to give us a clue as to what, physically speaking, Translation is all about. That was the first real clue and we thought he'd done us a favor. Now I'm not so sure."

He leaned forward. "Every person I know of who was Translated was someone Tropile knew. The three kids were in his class at the nursery school—we put him there for a while to keep him busy, when he first came to us. Two of the men he bunked with are gone; the mess boy who served him is gone; his wife is gone. Meditation? No, Germyn. I *know* most of those people. Not a damned one of them would have spent a moment Meditating on Connectivity to save his life. And what do you make of that?"

SWALLOWING hard, Germyn said: "I just remembered. That man Harmane—"

"What about him?"

"The one who was Translated last week. He also knew Tropile. He was the Keeper of the House of the Five Regulations when Tropile was there."

"You see? And I'll bet the woman knew Tropile, too." Haendl got up fretfully, pacing around. "Here's the thing, Germyn. I'm licked. You know what I am, don't you?"

Germyn said levelly: "I believe you to be Wolf."

"You believe right. That doesn't matter any more. You don't like Wolves. Well, I don't like you. But this thing is too big for me to care about that any more. Tropile has started something happening, and what the end of it is going to be, I can't tell. But I know this: We're not safe, either of us. Maybe you still think Translation is a fulfillment. I don't; it scares me. *But it's going to happen to me*—and to you. It's going to happen to everybody who ever

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had anything to do with Glenn Tropile, unless we can somehow stop it—and I don't know how. Will you help me?"

Germyn, trying not to tremble when all his buried fears screamed *Wolf!*, said honestly: "I'll I'll have to sleep on it."

Haendl looked at him for a moment. Then he shrugged. Almost to himself, he said: "Maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe we can't do anything about it anyhow. All right. I'll come back in the morning, and if you've made up your mind to help, we'll start trying to make plans. And if you've made up your mind the other way—well, I guess I'll have to fight off a few Citizens. Not that I mind that."

Germyn stood up and bowed. He began the ritual Four Urgings.

"Spare me that," Haendl growled. "Meanwhile, Germyn, if I were you, I wouldn't make any long-range plans. You may not be here to carry them out."

Germyn asked thoughtfully: "And if you were *you*?"

"I'm not making any," Haendl said grimly.

CITIZEN Germyn, feeling utterly tainted with the scent of the Wolf in his home, tossed in his bed, sleepless. His eyes were wide open, staring at the dark ceiling. He could hear his wife's decorous breathing from the foot of the bed—soft and regular, it should have been lulling him to sleep.

It was not. Sleep was very far away.

Germyn was a brave enough man, as courage is measured among Citizens. That is to say, he had never been afraid, though it was true that there had been very little occasion. But he was afraid now. He didn't want to be Translated.

The Wolf, Haendl, had put his finger on it: *Perhaps you still think Translation is a fulfillment.* Translation – the reward of Meditation, the gift bestowed on only a handful of gloriously transfigured persons. That was one thing. But the sort of Translation that was now involved was nothing like that—not if it happened to children; not if it happened to Gala Tropile; not if it happened to a machine.

And Glenn Tropile was involved in it.

Germyn turned restlessly.

If people who knew Glenn Tropile were likely to be Translated, and people who Meditated on Connectivity were likely to be Translated, then people who knew Glenn Tropile and didn't want to be Translated had better not Meditate on Connectivity.

It was very difficult to *not* think of Connectivity.

Endlessly he calculated sums in

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arithmetic in his mind, recited the Five Regulations, composed Greeting Poems and Verses on Viewing. And endlessly he kept coming back to Tropile, to Translation, to Connectivity. He didn't *want* to be Translated. But still the thought had a certain lure. What was it like? Did it hurt?

Well, probably not, he speculated. It was very fast, according to Haendl's report—if you could believe what an admitted Son of the Wolf reported. But Germyn had to.

Well, if it was fast—at that kind of speed, he thought, perhaps you would die instantly. Maybe Tropile was dead. Was that possible? No, it didn't seem so; after all, there was the fact of the connection between Tropile and so many of the recently Translated. What was the connection there? Or, generalizing, what connections were involved in—

He rescued himself from the dread word and summoned up the first image that came to mind. It happened to be Tropile's wife—Gala Tropile, who had disappeared herself, in this very room.

Gala Tropile. He stuck close to the thought of her, a little pleased with himself. That was the trick of *not* thinking of Connectivity—to think so hard and fully of something else as to leave no room in the mind for the unwanted thought. He pictured every line of her face, every wave of her stringy hair . . .

It was very easy that way. He was pleased.

XII

ON Mount Everest, the sullen stream of off-and-on responses that was "mind" to the Pyramid had taken note of a new input signal.

It was not a critical mind. Its only curiosity was a restless urge to shove-and-haul, and there was no shove-and-haul about what to it was perhaps the analogue of a man's hunger pang. The input signal said: *Do thus.* It obeyed.

Call it craving for a new flavor. Where once it had patiently waited for the state that Citizens knew as Meditation on Connectivity, and the Pyramid itself perhaps knew as a stage of ripeness in the fruits of its wristwatch mine, now it wanted a different taste. Unripe? Overripe? At any rate, different.

Accordingly, the high-frequency wheep, wheep changed in tempo and in key, and the bouncing echoes changed and . . . there was a ripe one to be plucked. (It's name was Innison.) And there another. (Gala Tropile.) And another, another—oh, many others—a babe from Tropile's nursery school and the Wheeling jailer and a woman Tropile once had coveted on the street.

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Once the ruddy starch-to-sugar mark of ripeness had been what human beings called Meditation on Connectivity and the Pyramids knew as a convenient blankness. Now the sign was a sort of empathy with the Component named Tropile. It didn't matter to the Pyramid on Mount Everest. It swung its electrostatic scythe and the—call them Tropiletropes—were harvested.

It did not occur to the Pyramid on Mount Everest that a Component might be directing its actions. How could it?

Perhaps the Pyramid on Mount Everest wondered, if it knew how to wonder, when it noticed that different criteria were involved in selecting components these days. (If it knew how to "notice." Surely even a Pyramid might wonder when, without warning or explanation, its orders were changed—not merely to harvest a different sort of Component, but to drag along with the flesh-and-blood needful parts a clanking assortment of machinery and metal, as began to happen. Machines? Why would the Pyramids need to Translate machines?

But why, on the other hand, would a Pyramid bother to question a directive, even if it were able to?

In any case, it didn't. It swung its scythe and gathered in what it was caused to gather in.

Men sometimes eat green fruit and come to regret it. Was it the same with Pyramids?

AND Citizen Germyn fell into the unsuspected trap. Avoiding Connectivity, he thought of Glenn Tropile—and the unfelt h-f pulses found him out.

He didn't see the Eye that formed above him. He didn't feel the gathering of forces that formed his trap. He didn't know that he was seized, charged, catapulted through space, caught, halted and drained. It happened too fast.

One moment he was in his bed; the next moment he was—elsewhere. There wasn't anything in between.

It had happened to hundreds of thousands of Components before him, but, for Citizen Germyn, what happened was in some ways different. He was not embalmed in nutrient fluid, formed and programmed to take his part in the Pyramid-structure, for he had not been selected by the Pyramid but by that single wild Component, Tropile. He arrived conscious, awake and able to move.

He stood up in a red-lit chamber. Vast thundering crashes of metal buffeted his ears. Heat sprang little founts of perspiration on his skin.

It was too much, too much to take in at once. Oily-skinned madmen, naked, were capering and

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shouting at him. It took him a moment to realize that they were not devils; this was not Hell; he was not dead.

"This way!" they were bawling at him. "Come on, hurry it up!"

He reeled, following their directions, across an unpleasantly warm floor, staggering and falling—the binary planet was a quarter denser than Earth—until he got his balance.

The capering madmen led him through a door—or sphincter or trap; it was not like anything he had ever seen. But it was a portal of a sort, and on the other side of it was something closer to sanity. It was another room, and though the light was still red, it was a paler, calmer red and the thundering ironmongery was a wall away. The madmen were naked, yes, but they were not mad. The oil on their skins was only the sheen of sweat.

"Where—where am I? he gasped.

Two voices, perhaps three or four, were all talking at once. He could make no sense of it. Citizen Germyn looked about him. He was in a sort of chamber that formed a part of a machine that existed for the unknown purposes of the Pyramids on the binary planet. And he was alive—and not even alone.

He had crossed more than a million miles of space without feeling a thing. But when what the naked men were saying began to penetrate, the walls lurhced around him.

It was true; he had been Translated.

He looked dazedly down at his own bare body, and around at the room, and then he realized they were still talking: "—when you get your bearings. Feel all right now? Come on, Citizen, snap out of it!"

Germyn blinked.

Another voice said peevishly: "Tropile's got to find some other place to bring them in. That foundry isn't meant for human beings. Look at the shape this one is in! Some time somebody's going to come in and we won't spot him in time and—pfut!"

The first voice said: "Can't be helped. Hey! Are you all right?"

Citizen Germyn looked at the naked man in front of him and took a deep breath of hot, sour air. "Of course I'm all right," he said.

The naked man was Haendl.

THE Tropile-petal "said" to the Alla Narova-petal: "Got another one! It's Citizen Germyn!" The petal fluttered feebly in soundless laughter.

The Alla Narova-petal "said": "Glenn, come back! The whole propulsion-pneuma just went out of circuit!"

Tropile pulled his attention away from his human acquisitions in the chamber off the foundry

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and allowed himself to fuse with the woman-personality. Together they reached out and explored along the pathways they had laboriously traced. The propulsion-pneuma was the complex of navigation-computers, drive generators, course-vectoring units that their own unit had been originally part of—until Glenn Tropile, by waking its Components, had managed to divert it for purposes of his own. The two of them reached out into it—

Dead end.

It was out of circuit, as Alla Narova had said. One whole limb of their body—their new, jointly tenanted body, that spanned a whole planet and reached across space to Earth—had been lopped off. Quick, quick, they separated, traced separate paths. They came together again: Still dead end.

The dyad that was Tropile and the woman reached out to touch the others in the snowflake and communicated—not in words, not in anything as slow and as opaque as words: *The Pyramids have lopped off another circuit.* The compound personality of the snowflake considered its course of action, reached its decision, acted. Quick, quick, three of the other members of the snowflake darted out of the collective unit and went about isolating and tracing the exact area that had been affected.

Tropile: "We expected this. They couldn't help noticing sooner or later that something was going wrong."

Alla Narova: "But, Glenn, suppose they cut *us* out of circuit? We're stuck here. We can't move. We can't get out of the tanks. If they know that we are the source of their trouble—"

Tropile: "Let them know! That's what we've got the others here for!" He was cocky now, self-assured, fighting. For the first time in his life, he was free to fight—to let his Wolf blood strive to the utmost—and he knew what he was fighting for. This wasn't a matter of Haendl's pitiful tanks and carbines against the invulnerable Pyramids; this was the invulnerability of the whole Pyramid system turned against the Pyramids!

It was a warning, the fact that the Pyramids had become alert to danger, had begun cutting sections of their planetary communications system out of the main circuit. But as a warning, it didn't frighten Tropile; it only spurred him to action.

Quick, quick, he and the woman-personality dissolved, sped away. Figuratively they sought out the most restive Components they could find, shook them by the shoulder, tried to wake them. Actually—well, what is "actually?" The physical fact was surely that they didn't move at all, for they were bound to their tank and to

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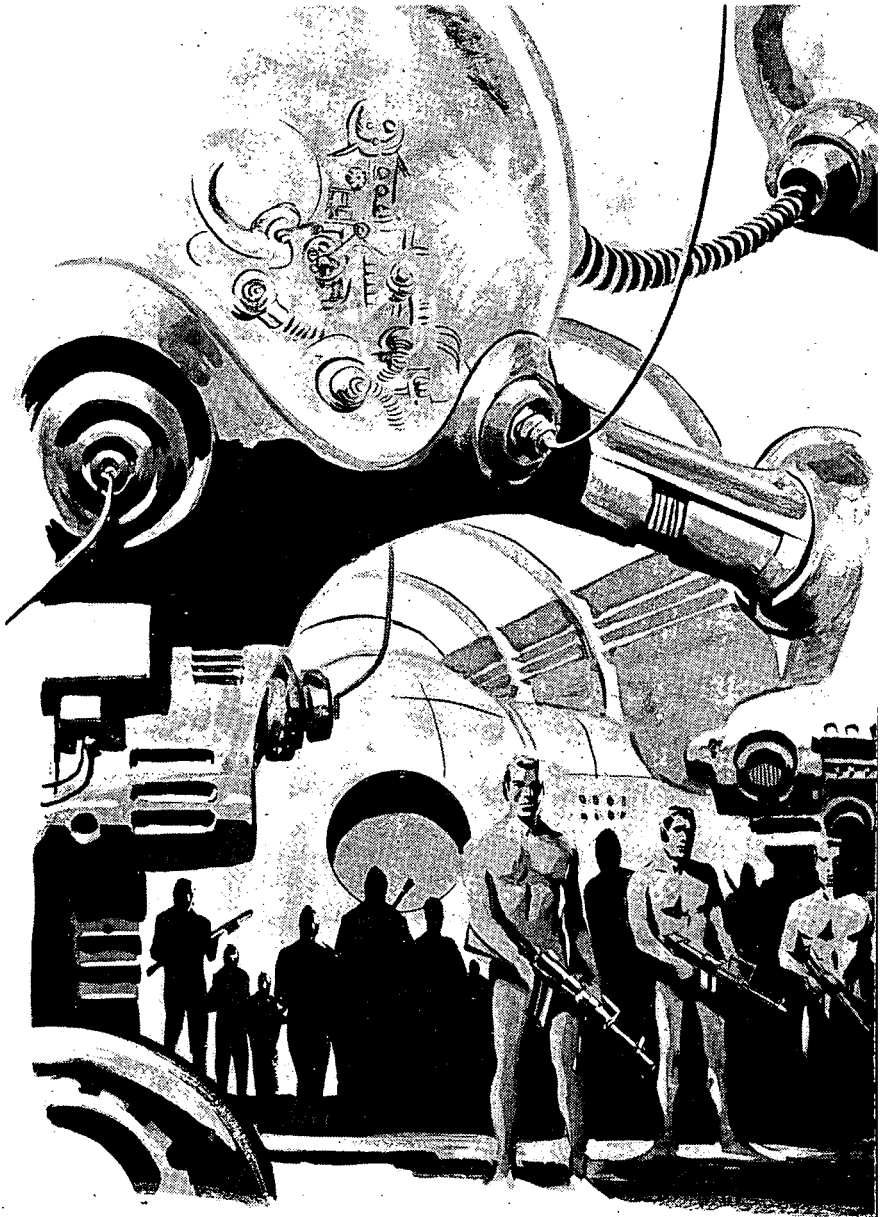

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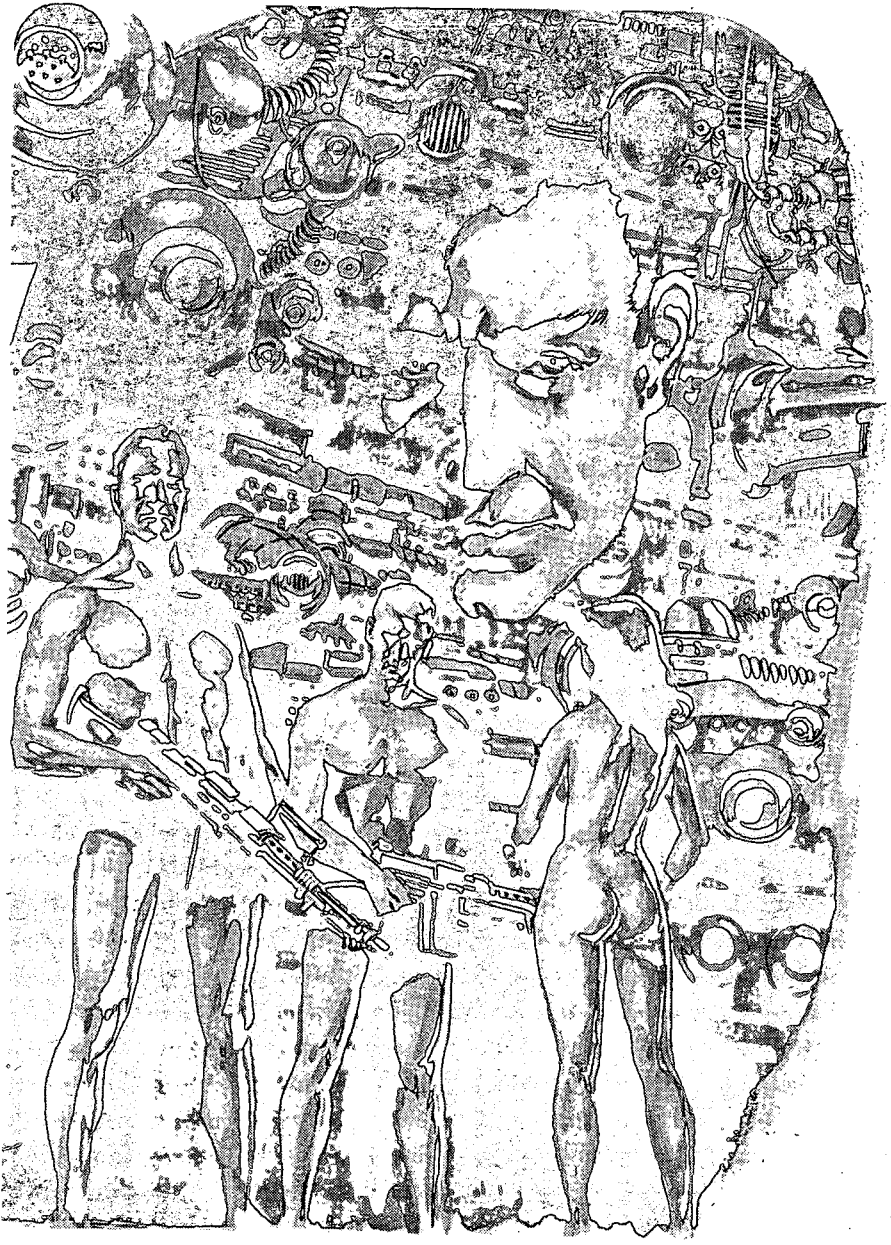

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the surgical joinings, each to each, at their temples. No crawling child in a playpen was more helplessly confined than Tropile and Alla Narova and the others.

And yet no human being had ever been more free.

REGARD that imbecile servant of Everyman, the thermostat. He runs the furnace in Everyman's house, he measures the doneness of Everyman's breakfast toast, he valves the cooling fluid through the radiator of Everyman's car. If Everyman's house stays too hot or too cold, the man swears at the lackwit switch and maybe buys a new one to plug in. But he never, never thinks that his thermostat might be plotting against him.

Thermostat : Man = Man : Pyramid. Only that and nothing more. It was not in the nature of a Pyramid to think that its Components, once installed, could reprogram themselves. No Component ever had. (But before Glenn Tropile, no Component had been Wolf.)

When Tropile found himself, he found others. They were men and women, real persons with gonads and dreams. They had been caught at the moment of blankness—yes; and frozen into that shape, true. But they were palimpsest personalities on which the Pyramids had programmed their duties. Underneath the Pyramids' cabalistic scrawl, the men and women still remained. They had only to be reached.

Tropile and Alla Narova reached them—one at a time, then by scores. The Pyramids made that possible. The network of communication that they had created for their own purposes encompassed every cell of the race and all its works. Tropile reached out from his floating snowflake and went where he wished—anywhere within the binary planet; to the brooding Pyramid on Earth; through the Eyes, wherever he chose on Earth's surface.

Physically, he was scarcely able to move a muscle. But, oh, the soaring range of his mind and vision!

CITIZEN Germyn was past shock, but just the same it was uncomfortable to be in a room with several dozen other persons, all of them naked. Uncomfortable. Once it would have been brain-shattering. For a Citizen to see his own Citizeness unclothed was gross lechery. To be part of a mixed and bare-skinned group was unthinkable. Or had been. Now it only made him uneasy.

He said numbly to Haendl: "Citizen, I pray you tell me what sort of place this is."

"Later," said Haendl gruffly, and led him out of the way. "Stay

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put," he advised. "We're busy."

And that was true. Something was going on, but Citizen Germyn couldn't make out exactly what it was. The naked people were worrying out a distribution of some sort of supplies. There were tools and there were also what looked to Citizen Germyn's unsophisticated eyes very much like guns. Guns? It was foolishness to think they were guns, Citizen Germyn told himself strongly. *Nobody* had guns. He touched the floor with an exploratory hand. It was warm and it shook with a nameless distant vibration. He shuddered.

Haendl came back; yes, they were guns. Haendl was carrying one.

"Ours!" he crowed. "That Tropile must've looted our armory at Princeton. By the looks of what's here, I doubt if he left a single round of ammunition. What the hell, they're more use here!"

"But what are we going to do with *guns?*"

Haendl looked at him with savage amusement. "Shoot."

Citizen Germyn said: "Please, Citizen. Tell me what this is all about."

Haendl sat down next to him on the warm, quivering floor and began fitting cartridges into a clip.

"We're fighting," he explained gleefully. "Tropile did it all. You've been shanghaied and so have all the rest of us. Tropile's alive! He's part of the Pyramid communications network — don't ask me how. But he's there and he has been hauling men and weapons and God knows what all up from Earth—you're on the binary planet now, you know—and we're going to bust things up so the Pyramids will *never* be able to put them back together again. Understand? Well, it doesn't matter if you don't. All you have to understand is that when I tell you to shoot this gun, you shoot."

Numbly, Citizen Germyn took the unfamiliar stock and barrel into his hands. Muscles he had forgotten he owned straightened the limp curve of his back, squared his shoulders and thrust out his chest.

It had been many generations since any of Citizen Germyn's people had known the feeling of being an Armed Man.

A naked woman with wild hair and a full, soft figure came toward them, jiggling in a way that agonized Citizen Germyn. He dropped his eyes to his gun and kept them there.

She cried: "Orders from Tropile! We've got to form a party and blow something up."

Haendl demanded: "Such as what?"

"I don't know what. I only know where. We've got a guide. And Tropile particularly asked for you,

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Haendl. He said you'd enjoy it."

And enjoy it Haendl did — anticipation was all over his face.

THEY formed a party of a dozen. They armed themselves with the guns Tropile had levitated from the bulging warehouse at Princeton. They supplied themselves with gray metal cans of something that Haendl said were explosives, and with fuses and detonators to match, and they set off—with their guide.

A guide! It was a shambling, fearsome monster!

When Citizen Germyn saw it, he had to fight an almost irresistible temptation to be ill. Even the bare skins about him no longer mattered; this new horror canceled them out.

"What — What —" he strangled, pointing.

Haendl laughed raucously. "That's Joey."

"What's Joey?"

"He works for us," said Haendl, grinning.

Joey was neither human nor beast; it was not Pyramid; it was nothing Citizen Germyn had ever seen or imagined before. It crouched on many-jointed limbs, and even so was twice the height of a man. Its ropy arms and legs were covered with fine chitinous spines, laid on as close as hairs in a pelt, and sharp as thorns. There was a layer of chitin around its reddish eyes. What was more horrible than all, it spoke.

It said squeakily: "You all ready? Come on, snap it up! The Pyramids have got something big building up and we've got to squash it."

Citizen Germyn whispered feverishly to Haendl: "That voice! It sounds odd, yes—but isn't it Tropile's voice?"

"Sure it is! That's what old Joey is good for," said Haendl. "Tropile says he's telepathic, whatever *that* is. Makes it handy for us."

And it did. Telepathy was the alien's very special use to Glenn Tropile, for what Joey was in fact was another Component, from a previous wristwatch mine. Joey's planet had once circled a star never visible from Earth; his home air was thin and his home sunlight was weak, and in consequence his race had developed a species of telepathy for communicating at long range. This was handy for the Pyramids, because it simplified the wiring. And it was equally handy for Glenn Tropile, once he managed to wake the creature—with its permission, he could use its body as a sort of walkie-talkie in directing the tactics of his shanghaied army.

That permission was very readily given. Joey remembered what the Pyramids had done to its own planet.

"Come on!" ordered Joey in

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Tropile's filtered voice, and they hastened through a straight and achingly cramped tunnel in single file, toward what Tropile had said was their target.

They had nearly reached it when, abruptly, there was a thundering of explosions ahead.

The party stopped, looked at each other, and got ready to move on more slowly.

At last it had started. The Pyramids were beginning to fight back.

XIII

CITIZENESS Roget Germyn, widow, woke from sleep like a well-mannered cat on the narrow lower third of the bed that her training had taught her to occupy, though it had been some days since her husband's Translation had emptied the Citizen's two-thirds permanently.

Someone had tapped gently on her door.

"I am awake," she called, in a voice just sufficient to carry.

A quiet voice said: "Citizeness, there is exceptional opportunity to Appreciate this morning. Come see, if you will. And I ask forgiveness for waking you."

She recognized the voice; it was the wife of one of her neighbors. The Citizeness made the appropriate reply, combining forgiveness and gratitude.

She dressed rapidly, but with appropriate pauses for reflection and calm, and stepped out into the street.

It was not yet daylight. Overhead, great sheets of soundless lightnings flared.

Inside Citizeness Germyn long-unfelt emotions stirred. There was something that was very like terror, and something that was akin to love. This was a generation that had never seen the aurora, for the ricocheting electron beams that cause it could not span the increasing distance between the orphaned Earth and its primary, Old Sol, and the small rekindled suns the Pyramids made were far too puny.

Under the sleeting aurora, small knots of Citizens stood about the streets, their faces turned up to the sky and illuminated by the distant light. It was truly an exceptional opportunity to Appreciate and they were all making the most of it.

Conscientiously, Citizeness Germyn sought out another viewer with whom to exchange comments on the spectacle above. "It is more bright than meteors," she said judiciously, "and lovelier than the freshly kindled Sun."

"Sure," said the woman. Citizeness Germyn, jolted, looked more closely. It was the Tropile woman — Gala? Was that her name? And what sort of name was *that?* But it fitted her well; she

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was the one who had been wife to Wolf and, more likely than not, part Wolf herself.

Still, the case was not proved. Citizeness Germyn said honestly: "I have never seen a sight to compare with this in all my life."

Gala Tropile said indifferently: "Yeah. Funny things are happening all the time these days, have you noticed? Ever since Glenn turned out to be—" She stopped.

Citizeness Germyn rapidly diagnosed her embarrassment and acted to cover it up. "That is so. I have seen Eyes a hundred times and yet has there been a Translation with the Eyes? No. But there have been Translations. It is queer."

"I suppose so," Gala Tropile said, looking upward at the display. She sighed.

Over their heads, a formed Eye was drifting slowly about, but neither of the women noticed it. The shifting lights in the sky obscured it.

"I wonder what causes that stuff," Gala Tropile said idly.

Citizeness Germyn made no attempt to answer. It was not the sort of question that would normally have occurred to her and therefore not a sort to which she could reply.

Moreover, it was not the question closest to Gala Tropile's heart at that moment—nor, for that matter, the question closest to Citizeness Germyn's. The question that underlay the thoughts of both was: *I wonder what happened to my husband.*

It was strange, but true, that the answers to all their questions were very nearly the same.

THE Alla-Narova mind said sharply: "Glenn, come back!"

Tropile withdrew from scanning the distant dark street. He laughed soundlessly. "I was watching my wife. God, we're giving them fits down there! The Pyramids must be churning things up, too—the sky is full of auroral displays. Looks like there's plenty of h-f bouncing around the atmosphere."

"Pay attention!" the Alla-Narova mind commanded.

"All right." Obediently, Tropile returned to the war he was waging.

It was a strange conflict, strangely fought. Tropile's mind searched the abysses and tunnels of the Pyramid planet, and what he sensed or saw was immediately communicated to all of the awakened Components who were his allies.

It was a godlike position. Was he sane? There was no knowing. Sanity no longer meant anything to Tropile. He was beyond such human affairs as lunacy or its reverse. An insane man is one who is out of joint with his environment. Tropile was himself his

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environment. His mind encompassed two planets and the space between. He saw with a thousand eyes. He worked with a thousand hands.

And he struck mighty blows.

The weakness of a network that reaches everywhere is that it is everywhere vulnerable. If a teletype repeater in Omaha garbles a single digit, printing units in Atlanta and Bangor will type out errors. Tropile, by striking at the Pyramids' net at a thousand points, garbled their communications and made them nearly useless. More, he took the Pyramid network for his own. The Tropile-pulse sped through the neurone guides of the Pyramid net, and what it encountered it mastered, and what it mastered it changed.

The Pyramids discovered that they had been attacked.

Frantically (if they felt frenzy), the Pyramids replaced Components; the Tropile-pulse woke the new ones. Unbelievingly (did they know how to "believe"?), the Pyramids isolated contaminated circuits; the Tropile-pulse bypassed them.

Desperately (or joyously or uffishly—one term fits exactly as well as another), the Pyramids returned to shove-and-haul, and there was much destruction, and some Components died.

But by then, the Components had reprogrammed themselves.

THE first job had been the matter of finding hands for the Tropile-brain to work with. Bring hands in, then! Tropile commanded the Pyramids' network and obediently it was done. The Translation mechanism, the electrostatic scythe that had harvested so many crops from the wristwatch mines, suffered a change and went to work not for the pickers but for the fruit.

The essential change in the operation of that particular pneuma had been simple; first, to "harvest" or "Translate" the men and women Tropile wanted as fighters instead of the meditative Citizen kind. Second, to divert the new arrivals to where they would not go straight to deep-freeze. It happened that the only alternate space Tropile could find was a sort of foundry that was nearly Hell, but that was only a detail. The important thing was that new helpers were arriving, with minds of their own and the capacity to move and act.

Then Tropile needed to communicate with them. He found the alien, ropy-limbed Component whose name vaguely approached "Joey." Joey's limited sense of telepathy was needed and so, with enormous difficulty, Tropile and Alla Narova, combined, managed to reach and wake it.

And so he had an army, captured humans for troops, an awak-

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ened Joey for liaison.

Tropile was lord of two worlds. Not only the Pyramids were under his thumb, but his own fellow humans whom he had drafted into his service. They ate when a captured circuit he controlled fed synthetic mush into troughs for them. They breathed because a captured circuit he directed created air. They would return to Earth when —and only when—a captured circuit he operated sent them home.

Sane?

By what standards?

And what difference did it make?

XIV

WITH a series of grinding shocks, like an enormous earthquake-fault relieving a strain, the Pyramids began to fight back.

"Tropile!" the Alla-Narova mind called urgently.

Tropile flashed to the trouble spot. Through eyes that were not his own, Tropile scanned the honeycombed world of the Pyramids. There was an area where huge and ancient vehicles lay covered with the slow dust of centuries, and the vehicles were beginning to move.

Caterpillar-treaded hauling machines were loading themselves with what Tropile judged were quickly synthesized explosives. Almost forgotten wheeled vehicles were creeping mindlessly out of nearly abandoned storage sections and lumbering painfully along the tunnels of the planet.

"Coming toward us," Tropile diagnosed dispassionately.

Alla Narova queried: "They mean to fight?"

"Of course. You see if you can penetrate the circuit that controls them. I—" already he was flashing away—"I'll get to the boys through Joey."

It was queer, looking through the eyes of the alien they called Joey; colors were all wrong, perspective was flat. But he could see, though cloudily. He saw Haendl joyously fitting a bayonet—*a bayonet!*—to a rifle; he saw Citizen Germyn, naked but square-shouldered, puffing valiantly along in the rear.

Tropile said through the strange vocal cords that belonged to the alien: "You'll have to hurry." (Strange to speak in words again!) "The Pyramids are heading toward the chambers where the Components are kept. I think they mean to kill us."

He flashed away, located the area, flashed back. "You'll have to go without me—I mean without Joey-me. The only way I see to get there is through a narrow little ventilation tunnel — I guess ventilation is what it was for."

Quickly (but against the familiar race of thought, it seemed

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agonizingly slow) he laid out the route for them and left; it was up to them. Watching from a dozen viewpoints at once, he saw the slow creep of the Pyramids' machines and the slower intersecting march of his little army. He studied the alternate cross routes and contrived to block some of them by interfering with the control-circuits of the emergency doors and portals.

But there were some circuits he could not control. The Pyramids had withdrawn whole sections of their net and areas of the planet were now hidden from him entirely. Sections of the vast maintenance-propulsion-manufacturing complex were no longer subject to his interference or control.

IT would be, Tropile thought dispassionately, a rather close thing. The chances were perhaps six out of ten that his hastily assembled task force would be able to intercept the convoy of automatic machines before it could reach the racks of nutrient tanks.

And if they were not in time?

Tropile almost laughed out loud, if that had been possible. Why, then, his body would be destroyed! How trivial a thing to worry about! He began to forget he owned a body; surely it was someone else's bone and tissue that lay floating in the eight-branched snowflake. He knew that this was not so. He knew that if his body were killed, he would die. And yet there was no sense of fear, no personal involvement. It was an interesting problem in scheduling and nothing more.

Would the human fighters get there in time?

Perhaps the automatic machines had senses, for as the first of the humans burst into the tunnel they were using, a few hundred yards ahead of the lead load-carrier, the machines shuddered to a stop. Pause for a second; then, laboriously, they began to back toward the nearest of the side passages that Tropile had been unable to block. He scanned it hurriedly. Good, good! The circuits surrounding the passage proper were out of his reach, but it led to another passage, an abandoned pipeline of sorts, it seemed to be. And *that* he could reach . . .

Patiently (how slowly the machines crept along!) he waited until one of the Pyramids' machines bearing explosives passed through an enormous valve in the line—and then the valve was thrown.

The explosion triggered every vehicle in the line. The damage was complete.

Scratch one threat from the Pyramids—

And almost at once, there was another urgent call from Alla Narova: "Tropile, quickly!"

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THE Pyramids were the mightiest race of warriors the Universe had ever known. They were invulnerable and unconquerable, except from within. Like Alexander the Great, they had met every enemy and whipped them all. And, like dying Alexander, they writhed and raged against the tiny, unseen bacillus within themselves.

Blindly, almost suicidally, the Pyramids returned to their ancient principle of shove-and-haul.

The geography of the binary planet was like a hive of bees, nearly featureless on the surface, but internally a congeries of tunnels, chambers, warrens, rooms, tubes and amphitheaters. Machinery and metal Components were everywhere thick under the planet's crust. The more delicate and more useful Components of flesh and blood were, to a degree, concentrated in a few areas . . .

And one of those areas had disappeared.

Tropile, battering futilely with his mind at the periphery of the vanished area, cried sharply to Alla Narova and the others: "It looks as though they've broken a piece right out of the planet! Everything stops here—there's a physical gap which I can't cross. Hurry, one of you—what was this section for?"

"Propulsion."

"I see." Tropile hesitated, con-

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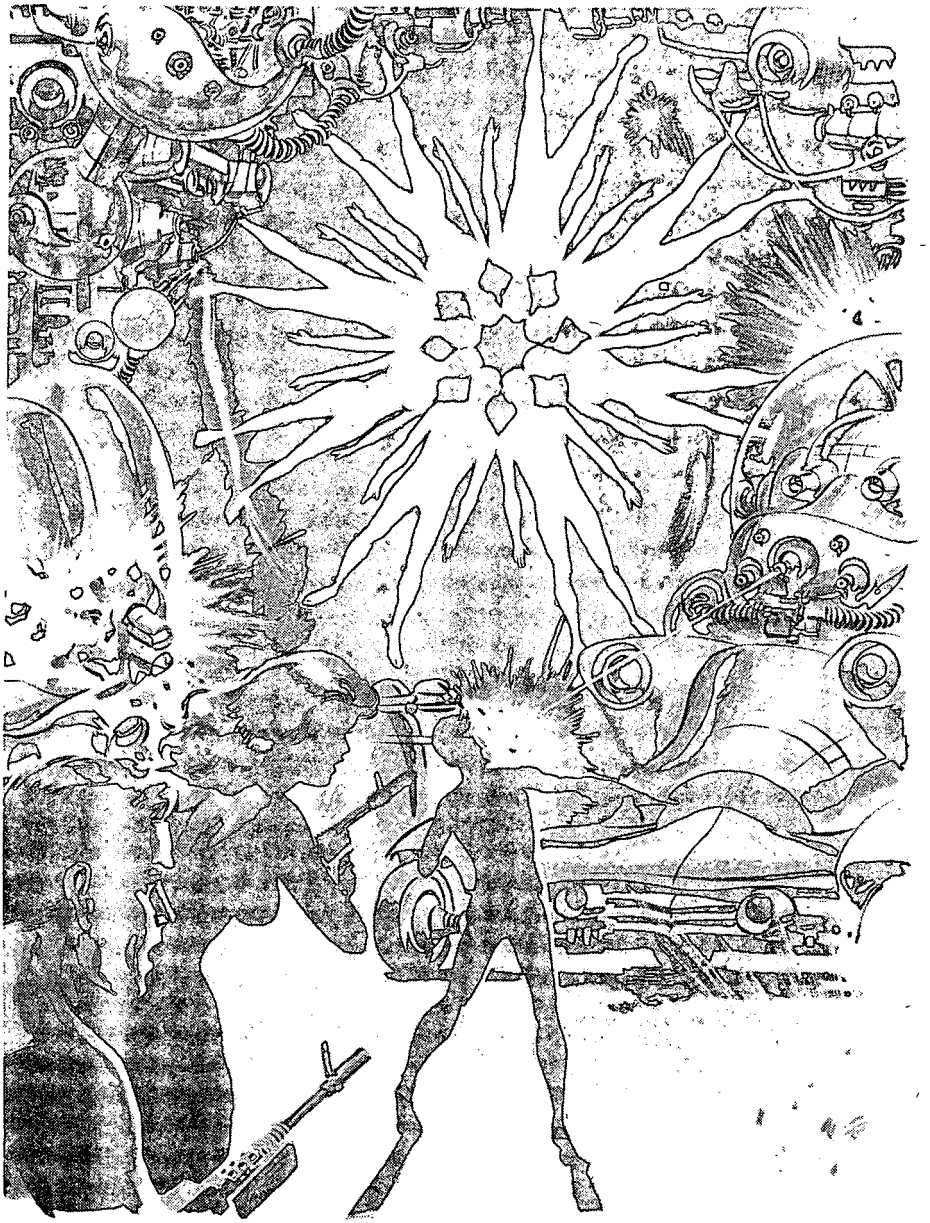

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fused for the first time since his awakening. "Wait."

He retreated to the snowflake and communed with the other eight-branched members, now become something that resembled his general staff. He told them—most of them already knew, but the telling took so little time that it was simpler to go through it from beginning to end:

"The Pyramids attempted to cut the propulsion-pneuma out of circuit some seconds or days ago and were unsuccessful; we awakened additional Components and were able to maintain contact with it. They have now apparently cut it loose from the planet itself. I do not think it is far, but there is a physical space between."

"The importance of the propulsion-pneuma is this: It controls the master generators of electrostatic force, which are used both to move this planet and ours, and to perform the act of Translation. If the Pyramids control it, they may be able to take us out of circuit, perhaps back to Earth, perhaps throwing us into space, where we will die. The question for decision: How can we counteract this move?"

A RUSH of voices all spoke at once; it was no trick for Tropile and the others to sort them out and follow the arguments of each, but it cannot be reproduced.

At last, one said: "There is a way. I will do it."

It was Alla Narova.

"What is the way?" Tropile demanded, curiously alarmed.

"I shall go with them, trace the areas the Pyramids are attempting to isolate, place my entire self—" by this she meant her "concentration," her "psyche," that part of all of them which flashed along the neurone guides unhampered by flesh or distance—" in the most likely point they will next cut loose. And then I shall cause the propulsion units on the severed sections to force them back into circuit."

Tropile objected: "But you don't know what will happen! We have never been cut off from our physical bodies, Alla Narova. It may be death. It may not be possible at all. You don't know!"

Alla Narova thought a smile and a farewell. She said: "No, I do not." And then, "Good-by, Tropile."

She had gone.

Furiously, Tropile hurled himself after her, but she was quick as he, too quick to catch; she was gone. *Foolishness, foolishness!* he shouted silently. How could she do an insane, chancy thing like this?

And yet what else was there to do? They were all ignorant babes, temporarily successful because there had been no defense against them, for who expects babes to rise

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up in rebellion? They didn't *know*. For all they could guess or imagine, the Pyramids had an effective counter for any move they might make. Temporary success meant nothing. It was the final decision that counted, when either the Pyramids were vanquished or the men, and what steps were needed to make that decision favor the men were anyone's guess—Alla Narova's was as good as his.

Tropile could only watch and wait.

Through a great many viewpoints and observers, he was able to see roughly what happened.

THERE was a section of the planet next the severed chunk where the mind and senses of Alla Narova lay coiled for a moment —and were gone. For what it had accomplished, her purpose succeeded. She had been taken. She was out of circuit.

The overwhelming consciousness of loss that flooded through Glenn Tropile was something outside of all his experience.

Next to him in the snowflake, the body which he had learned to think of as the body of Alla Narova twisted sharply as though waking from a dream—and lay flaccid, floating in the fluid.

"Alla Narova! *Alla Narova!*"

There was no answer.

A voice came piercingly: "Tropile! Here now, quickly!"

Good-by, Alla Narova! He flashed away to see what the other voice had found. Great mindless boulders were chipping away from the crust of the binary planet and whirling like midges in the void around it.

"What is it?" cried one of the others.

Tropile had no answer. It was the Pyramids, clearly. Were they attempting to demolish their own planet? Were they digging away at the crust to uncover the maggot's-nest of awakened Components beneath?

"The air!" cried Tropile sharply, and knew it was true. What the Pyramids were up to was a simple delousing operation. If you could destroy their own machinery for maintaining air and pressure and temperature, they would destroy all living things within — including Haendl and Citizen Germyn and thus, in the final analysis, including the bodies of Tropile and his awakened fellows. For without the mobile troops to defend their helpless cocoons against the machines of the Pyramids, the limp bodies could be destroyed as easily as a larva under a farmer's heel.

So Alla Narova had failed.

Alone against the Pyramids, she had been unable to bring the recaptured sections back into the circuit that Tropile's Components now dominated. It was the end of hope; but it was not the fear

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of defeat and damnation for the Earth that paralyzed Tropile. It was Alla Narova, gone from him forever.

The Pyramids were too strong.

And yet, he thought, quickening, they had been too strong before and still a weak spot had been found!

"Think," he ordered himself desperately.

And then again: "Think!" Components stirred restlessly around him, questioning. "Think!" he cried mightily. "All of you, think! Think of your lives and hopes!

"Think!

"Hope!

"Worry!

"Dream!"

The Components were reaching toward him now, wonderingly. He commanded them violently: "Do it—concentrate, wish, think! Let your minds run free and think of Earth, pleasant grass and warm sun! Think of loving and sweat and heartbreak! Think of death and birth! *Think,* for the love of heaven, *think!*"

And the answer was not in sound, but it was deafening.

IN the cut-off sections, Alla Narova's soaring mind lay trapped. It had not been enough; she could not force her will against the dull inflexibility of the Pyramids . . .

Until that inflexible will began to waver.

There was a leakage of thought.

It maddened and baffled the Pyramids. The whole neuronic network was resounding to a babble of thoughts and emotions that, to a Pyramid, were utterly demented! The rousing Component minds throbbed with urge and emotion that were new to Pyramid experience. What could a Pyramid make of a human's sex drive? Or of the ropy-armed aliens' passionate deification of the Egg? What of hunger and thirst and the blazing Wolf-need for odds and advantage that streamed out of such as Tropile?

They wavered, unsure. Their reactions were slow and very confused.

For Alla Narova succeeded in her purpose. She was able to reach out across the space and barrier to Tropile and the propulsion-pneuma was back in circuit. The section that controlled the master generators of the electronic scythe lay under his hands.

"Now!" he cried, and all of the Components reached out to grasp and move.

"Now!" And the central control was theirs; the full flood of power from the generators was at their command.

"Now! Now! Now!" And they reached out, with a fat pencil of electrostatic force and caught the sluggish, brooding Pyramid on Mount Everest.

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It had squatted there without motion for more than two centuries. Now it quivered and seemed to draw back, but the probing pencil caught it, and whirled it, and hurled it up and out of Earth, into the tiny artificial sun.

It struck with a flare of blue-white light.

"One gone!" gloated Tropile. "Alla Narova, are you there?"

"Still here," she called from a great distance. "Again?"

"Again!"

They reached for the Pyramids and found them, wherever they were. Some lay close to the surface of the binary planet, and some were hundreds of miles within, and a few, more desperate than the others or merely assigned to the task, they discovered at the very portal of the single spaceship of the Pyramids.

But wherever they were and whatever they chose to do, each one of them was found and seized. They came wriggling and shaking, like trout on an angler's line. They came bursting through layer on layer of impenetrable metal that, nevertheless, they penetrated. They came by the dozens and scores, and at last by the thousands; but they came.

There were more and more flares of blue-white light on the tiny sun—so many that Tropile found himself scouring the planet in a desperate search for one surviving Pyramid—not to destroy as an enemy, but to keep for a specimen.

But he searched in vain.

The Pyramids were destroyed, gone. There was not one left. The Earth lay open and free under its tiny sun for the first time in centuries.

It had been a strange war, but a short one.

And it was over.

XIV

TROPILE swam up out of hammering blackness into daylight and pain.

It *hurt*. He was being born again—coming back to life—and it had all the agonies of parturition, except that they were visited upon the creature being born, himself. There were crushing blows at his temples that pounded and pained like no other ache he had ever felt. He moaned raspingly.

Someone moved blurrily over his shut eyes. He felt something sting sharply at the base of his brain. Then it tingled, warming his scalp, comforting it, numbing it. Pain went slowly away.

He opened his eyes.

Four masked torturers were leaning over him. He stared, not understanding; but the eyes were not torturers' eyes, and in a moment the masks came off. Surgical masks—and the faces beneath the

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masks were human faces.

Surgeons and nurses.

He blinked at them and said groggily: "Where am we?" And then he remembered.

He was back on Earth; he was merely human again.

Someone came bustling into the room and he knew without looking that it was Haendl.

"We beat them, Tropile!" Haendl cried. "No, cancel that. *You* beat them. We've destroyed every Pyramid there was, and a nice hot fire they're making up there on the sun, eh? Beautiful work, Tropile. Beautiful! You're a credit to the name of Wolf!"

The surgeons stirred uneasily, but apparently, Tropile thought, there had been changes, for they did no more than that.

Tropile touched his temples fretfully and his fingers rested on gauze bandages. It was true: he was out of circuit. The long reach of his awareness was cut short at his skull; there was no more of the infinite sweep and grasp he had known as part of the snowflake in the nutrient fluid.

"Too bad," he whispered hopelessly.

"What?" Haendl frowned. The nurse next to him whispered something and he nodded. "Oh, I see. You're still a little groggy, right? Well, that's not hard to understand—they tell me it was a tricky job of surgery, separating you from that gunk the Pyramids had wired into your head."

"Yes," said Tropile, and closed his ears, though Haendl went on talking. After a while, Tropile pushed himself up and swung his legs over the side of the operating table. He was naked. Once that would have bothered him enormously, but now it didn't seem to matter.

"Find me some clothes, will you?" he asked. "I'm back. I might as well start getting used to it."

GLENN Tropile found that he was a returning hero, attracting a curious sort of hero-worship wherever he went. It was not, he thought after careful analysis, *exactly* what he might have expected. For instance, a man who went out and killed a dragon in the old days was received with great gratitude and rejoicing, and if there was a prince's daughter around, he married her. Fair enough, after all. And Tropile had slain a foe more potent than any number of dragons.

But he tested the attention he received and found no gratitude in it. It was odd.

What it was like most of all, he thought, was the sort of attention a reigning baseball champion might get—in a country where cricket was the national game. He had done something which, everybody agreed, was an astonishing

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feat, but about which nobody seemed to care. Indeed, there was an area of accusation in some of the attention he got.

Item: nearly ninety thousand erstwhile Components had now been brought back to ambient life, most of them with their families long dead, all of them a certain drain on the limited resources of the planet. And what was Glenn Tropile going to do about it?

Item: the old distinctions between Citizen and Wolf no longer made much sense now that so many Componentized Citizens had fought shoulder to shoulder with Componentized Sons of the Wolf. But didn't Glenn Tropile think he had gone a little too far *there?*

And item — looking pretty far ahead, of course, but still—well, just what *was* Glenn Tropile going to do about providing a new sun for Earth, when the old one wore out and there would be no Pyramids to tend the fire?

He sought refuge with someone who would understand him. That, he was pleased to realize, was easy. He had come to know several persons extremely well. Loneliness, the tortured loneliness of his youth, was permanently behind him, *definitely.*

For example, he could seek out Haendl, who would understand everything very well.

Haendl said: "It is a bit of a letdown, I suppose. Well, hell with it; that's life." He laughed grimly. "Now that we've got rid of the Pyramids, there's plenty of other work to be done. Man, we can breathe now! We can plan ahead! This planet has maundered along in its stupid, rutted, bogged-down course too many years already, eh? It's time we took over! And we'll be doing it, I promise you. You know, Tropile—" he sniggered—"I only regret one thing."

"What's that?" Tropile asked cautiously.

"All those weapons, out of reach! Oh, I'm not *blaming* you. But you can see what a lot of trouble it's going to be now, stocking up all over again—and there isn't much we can do about bringing order to this tired old world, is there, until we've got the guns to do it with again?"

Tropile left him much sooner than he had planned.

CITIZEN Germyn, then? The man had fought well, if nothing else. Tropile went to find him and, for a moment at least, it was very good. Germyn said: "I've been doing a lot of thinking, Tropile. I'm glad you're here." He sent his wife for refreshments, and decorously she brought them in, waited for exactly one minute, and then absented herself.

Tropile burst into speech as soon as she left. "I'm beginning to realize what has happened to the

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human race, Germyn. I don't mean just now, when we licked the Pyramids and so on. No, I mean hundreds of years ago, what happened when the Pyramids arrived, and what has been happening since. Did you ever hear of Indians, Germyn?"

Germyn frowned minutely and shrugged.

"They were, oh, hundreds *and* hundreds of years ago. They were a different color and not very civilized—of course, nobody was then. But the Indians were nomads, herdsmen, hunters—like that. And the white people came from Europe and wanted this country for themselves. So they took it. And do you know something? I don't think the Indians ever knew what hit them."

"*They* didn't know about land grants and claiming territory for the crown and church missions and expanding populations. They didn't have those things. It's true that they learned pretty well, by and by—at least they learned things like guns and horses and firewater; they didn't have those things, either, but they could see some sense to them, you know. But I really don't think the Indians ever knew exactly what the Europeans were up to, until it was too late to matter.

"And it was the same with us and the Pyramids, only more so. What the devil *did* they want? I mean, yes, we found out what they did with the Translated people. But what were they *up* to? What did they *think? Did* they think? You know, I've got a kind of a crazy idea—maybe it's not crazy, maybe it's the truth. Anyway, I've been thinking. Suppose even the *Pyramids* weren't the Pyramids? We never talked to one of them. We never gave it a Rorschach or tested its knee jerks. We licked them, but we don't know anything about them. We don't even know if they were the guys that started the whole bloody thing, or if they were just sort of super-sized Components themselves. Do we?

"And meanwhile, here's the human race, up against something that it not only can't understand, same as the Indians couldn't the whites, but that it can't begin to make a *guess* about. At least the Indians had a clue now and then, you know—I mean they'd see the sailors off the great white devil ship making a beeline for the Indian women and so on, and they'd begin to understand there was *something* in common. But we didn't have that much.

"So what did we do? Why, we did like the reservation Indians. We turned inward. We got loaded on firewater—Meditation—and we closed our minds to the possibility of ever expanding again. And there we were, all tied up in our own knots. Most of the race rebelled

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against action, because it had proven useless—Citizens. A few of the race rebelled against *that,* because it was not only useless but *deliberately* useless—Wolves. But they're the same kind of people. You've seen that for yourself, right? And—"

Tropile stopped, suddenly aware that Citizen Germyn was looking tepidly pained.

"What's the matter?" Tropile demanded harshly.

Citizen Germyn gave him the faint deprecatory Quirked Smile. "I know you thought you were a Wolf, but—I told you I've been thinking a lot, and that's what I was thinking about. *Truly,* Citizen, you do yourself no good by pretending that you really thought you were Wolf. Clearly you were not; the rest of us might have been fooled, but certainly you couldn't fool yourself.

"Now here's what I think you ought to do. When I found you were coming, I asked several rather well-known Citizens to come here later this evening. There won't be any embarrassment. I only want you to talk to them and set the record straight, so that this terrible blemish will no longer be held against you. Times change and perhaps a certain latitude is advisable now, but certainly you don't want—"

Tropile also left Citizen Germyn sooner than he had expected to.

THERE remained Alla Narova, but, queerly, she was not to be found.

Instantly it became clear to Tropile that it was she above all whom he needed to talk to. He remembered the shared beauty of their plunging drive through the neurone-guides of the Pyramids, the linked and inextricable flow of their thoughts and of their most hidden feelings.

She could not be very far, he thought numbly, cursing the blindness of his human eyes, the narrowness of his human senses. Time was when two worlds could not have hidden her from him; but that time was gone. He walked from place to place with the angry resentful tread of one used to riding—no, to flying, or faster than flying. He asked after her. He searched.

And at last he found — not her. A note. At one of the stations where the re-awakened Components were funneled back into human affairs, there was a letter waiting for him:

I'm sure you will look for me. Please don't. You thought that there were no secrets between us, but there was one.

When I was Translated, I was sixty-one years old. Two years before that, I was caught in a collapsing building; my legs are useless, and I had grown quite fat.

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I do not want you to see me fat and old.

Alla Narova.

And that was that, and at last Glenn Tropile turned to the last person of all those on his list who had known him well. Her name was Gala Tropile.

SHE had got thinner, he observed. They sat together quietly and there was considerable awkwardness, but then he noticed that she was weeping. Comforting her ended the awkwardness and he found that he was talking:

"It was like being a god, Gala! I swear, there's no feeling like it. I mean it's like — well, maybe if you'd just had a baby, and invented fire, and moved a mountain, and transmuted lead into gold —maybe if you'd done all of those things, then you might have some idea. But I was everywhere at once, Gala, and I could do anything! I fought a whole world of Pyramids, do you realize that? Me! And now I come back to—"

He stopped her in time; it seemed she was about to weep again.

He went on: "No, Gala, don't misunderstand, I don't hold anything against you. You were right to leave me in the field. What did I have to offer you? Or myself, for that matter? And I don't know that I have anything now, but—"

He slammed his fist against the table. "They talk about putting the Earth back in its orbit! Why? And how? My God, Gala, we don't know *where* we are. Maybe we could tinker up the gadgets the Pyramids used and turn our course backward—but do you know what Old Sol looks like? I don't. I never saw it.

"And neither did you or anyone else alive.

"It was like being a god—

"And they talk about going back to things as they were—

"I'm sick of that kind of thinking! Wolves or Citizens, they're dead on their feet and don't know it. I suppose they'll snap out of it in time, but I can't wait. I won't live that long.

"Unless—"

He paused and looked at her, confused.

Gala Tropile met her husband's eyes.

"Unless what, Glenn?"

He shrugged and turned away.

"Unless you go back, you mean." He stared at her; she nodded. "You want to go back," she said, without stress. "You don't want to stay here with me, do you? You want to go back into that tub of soup again and float like a baby. You don't want to *have* babies—you want to *be* one."

"Gala, you don't understand. We can own the Universe. I mean mankind can. And I can do it.

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Why not? There's nothing for me—"

"That's right, Glenn. There's nothing for you here. Not any more."

He opened his mouth to speak, looked at her, spread his hands helplessly. He didn't look back as he walked out the door, but he knew that his back was turned not only on the woman who happened to be his wife, but on mankind and all of the flesh.

IT was night outside, and warm. Tropile stood in the old street surrounded by the low, battered houses—and he could make them new and grand! He looked up at the stars that swung in constellations too new and changeable to have names. *There* was the Universe.

Words were no good; there was no explaining things in words. Naturally he couldn't make Gala or anyone else understand, for flesh couldn't grasp the realities of mind and spirit that were liberated from flesh. Babies! A home! And the whole grubby animal business of eating and drinking and sleeping! How could anyone ask to stay in the mire when the stars challenged overhead?

He walked slowly down the street, alone in the night, an apprentice godling renouncing mortality. There was nothing here for him, so why this sense of loss?

Duty said (or was it Pride?): "Someone must give up the flesh to control Earth's orbit and weather—why not you?"

Flesh said (or was it his soul—whatever that was?): "But you will be *alone*."

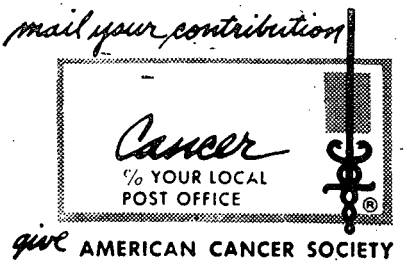
He stopped, and for a moment he was poised between destiny and the dust . . .

Until he became aware of footsteps behind him, running, and Gala's voice: "Wait! Wait, Glenn! I want to go with you!"

And he turned and waited, but only until she caught up, and then he went on.

But not — forever and always again — not alone.

— FREDERIK POHL and C. M. KORNBLUTH



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GRAY FLANNEL ARMOR

By FINN O'DONNEVAN

Would knights have been still more bold in days of old . . . if they'd had transistor amulets?

THE means which Thomas Hanley selected to meet the girl who later became his wife is worthy of note, particularly by anthropologists, sociologists and students of the bizarre. It serves, in its humble way, as an example of one of the more obscure mating customs of the late 20th century. And since this custom had an impact upon modern American industry, Hanley's story has considerable importance.

Thomas Hanley was a tall, slim young man, conservative in his tastes, moderate in his vices, and modest to a fault. His conversa-

Illustrated by DILLON

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tion with either sex was perfectly proper, even to the point of employing the verbal improprieties suitable to his age and station. He owned several gray flannel suits and many slim neckties with regimental stripes. You might think you could pick him out of a crowd because of his horn-rimmed glasses, but you would be wrong. That wasn't Hanley. Hanley was the other one.

Who would believe that, beneath this meek, self-effacing, industrious, conforming exterior beat a wildly romantic heart? Sadly enough, anyone would, for the disguise fooled only the disguised.

Young men like Hanley, in their gray flannel armor and horn-rimmed visors, are today's knights of chivalry. Millions of them roam the streets of our great cities, their footsteps firm and hurried, eyes front, voices lowered, dressed to the point of invisibility. Like actors or bewitched men, they live their somber lives, while within them the flame of romance burns and will not die.

Hanley daydreamed continually and predictably of the swish and thud of swinging cutlasses, of great ships driving toward the sun under a press of sail, of a maiden's eyes, dark and infinitely sad, peering at him from behind a gossamer veil. And, predictably still, he dreamed of more modern forms of romance.

But romance is a commodity difficult to come by in the great cities. This fact was recognized only recently by our more enterprising businessmen. And one night, Hanley received a visit from an unusual sort of salesman.

HANLEY had returned to his one-room apartment after a harried Friday at the office. He loosened his tie and contemplated, with a certain melancholy, the long weekend ahead. He didn't want to watch the boxing on television and he had seen all the neighborhood movies. Worst of all, the girls he knew were uninteresting and his chances for meeting others were practically nil.

He sat in his armchair as the deep blue twilight spread over Manhattan, and speculated on where he might find an interesting girl, and what he would say if he found one, and —

His doorbell rang.

As a rule, only peddlers or solicitors for the Firemen's Fund called on him unannounced. But tonight he could welcome even the momentary pleasure of turning down a peddler. So he opened the door and saw a short, dapper, flashily dressed little man beaming at him.

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"Good evening, Mr. Hanley," the little man said briskly. "I'm Joe Morris, a representative of the New York Romance Service, with its main office in the Empire State Building and branches in all the boroughs, Westchester and New Jersey. We're out to serve lonely people, Mr. Hanley, and that means you. Don't deny it! Why else would you be sitting home on a Friday night? You're lonely and it's our business and our pleasure to serve you. A bright, sensitive, good-looking young fellow like yourself needs girls, nice girls, pleasant, pretty, understanding girls—"

"Hold on," Hanley said sternly. "If you run some sort of a fancy call girl bureau —"

He stopped, for Joe Morris had turned livid. The salesman's throat swelled with anger and he turned and started to leave.

"Wait!" said Hanley. "I'm sorry."

"I'll have you know, sir, I'm a family man," Joe Morris said stiffly. "I have a wife and three children in the Bronx. If you think for a minute I'd associate myself with anything underhanded — "

"I'm really sorry." Hanley ushered Morris in and gave him the armchair.

Mr. Morris immediately regained his brisk and jovial manner.

"No, Mr. Hanley," he said, "the young ladies I refer to are not — ah — professionals. They are sweet, normal, romantically inclined young girls. But they are lonely. There are many lonely girls in our city, Mr. Hanley."

SOMEHOW, Hanley had thought the condition applied only to men. "Are there?" he asked.

"There are. The purpose of the New York Romance Service," said Morris, "is to bring young people together under suitable circumstances."

"Hmm," Hanley said. "I take it then you run a sort of—if you'll pardon the expression — a sort of Friendship Club?"

"Not at all! Nothing like it! My dear Mr. Hanley, have you ever attended a Friendship Club?"

Hanley shook his head.

"You should, sir," said Morris. "Then you could really appreciate our Service. Friendship Clubs! Picture, if you will, a barren hall, one flight up in the cheaper Broadway area. At one end, five musicians in frayed tuxedos play, with a dreary lack of enthusiasm, the jittery songs of the day. Their thin music echoes disconsolately through the hall and blends with the screech of traffic outside. There is a row of chairs on either side of the

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hall, men on one side, women on the other. All are acutely embarrassed by their presence there.

"They cling to a wretched nonchalance, nervously chain-smoking cigarettes and stamping out the butts on the floor. From time to time, some unfortunate gets up his courage to ask for a dance and, stiffly, he moves his partner around the floor, under the lewd and cynical eyes of the rest. The master of ceremonies, an overstuffed idiot with a fixed and ghastly smile, hurries around, trying to inject some life into the corpse of the evening. But to no avail."

Morris paused for breath. "That is the anachronism known as the Friendship Club — a strained, nervous, distasteful institution better suited to Victorian times than to our own. At the New York Romance Service, we have done what should have been done years ago. We have applied scientific precision and technological know-how to a thorough study of the factors essential to a successful meeting between the sexes."

"What are those factors?" Hanley inquired.

"The most vital ones," said Morris, "are spontaneity and a sense of fatedness."

"Spontaneity and fate seem to be contradictory terms," Hanley pointed out.

"Of course. Romance, by its very nature, must be composed of contradictory elements. We have graphs to prove it."

"Then you sell romance?" Hanley asked dubiously.

"The very article! The pure and pristine substance itself! Not sex, which is available to everyone. Not love — no way of guaranteeing permanency and therefore commercially impracticable. We sell *romance*, Mr. Hanley, the missing ingredient in modern society, the spice of life, the vision of all the ages!"

"That's very interesting," Hanley said. But he questioned the validity of Morris's claims. The man might be a charlatan or he might be a visionary. Whatever he was, Hanley doubted whether he could sell *romance*. Not the real thing. Not the dark and fitful visions which haunted Hanley's days and nights.

HE stood up. "Thank you, Mr. Morris. I'll think over what you've said. Right now, I'm in rather a rush, so if you wouldn't mind — "

"But, sir! Surely you can't afford to pass up *romance!*"

"Sorry, but — "

"Try our system for a few days, absolutely free of charge," Mr. Morris said. "Here, put this in your lapel." He handed Hanley something that looked like a

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small transistor radio with a tiny video eye.

"What's this?" Hanley asked.

"A small transistor radio with a tiny video eye."

"What does it do?"

"You'll see. Just give it a try. We're the country's biggest firm specializing in romance, Mr. Hanley. We aim to stay that way by continuing to fill the needs of millions of sensitive young American men and women. Remember—romances sponsored by our firm are fated, spontaneous, esthetically satisfying, physically delightful and morally justifiable."

And with that, Joe Morris shook Hanley's hand and left.

Hanley turned the tiny transistor radio in his hand. It had no buttons or dials. He fastened it to the lapel of his jacket. Nothing happened.

He shrugged his shoulders, tightened his tie and went out for a walk.

It was a clear, cool night. Like most nights in Hanley's life, it was a perfect time for romance. Around him lay the city, infinite in its possibilities and rich in promise. But the city was devoid of fulfillment. He had walked these streets a thousand nights, with firm step, eyes front, ready for anything. And nothing had ever happened.

He passed apartment buildings and thought of the women behind the high, blank windows, looking down, seeing a lonely walker on the dark streets and wondering about him, thinking...

"Nice to be on the roof of a building," a voice said. "To look down on the city."

Hanley stopped short and whirled around. He was completely alone. It took him a moment to realize that the voice had come from the tiny transistor radio.

"What?" Hanley asked.

The radio was silent.

Look down on the city, Hanley mused. The radio was suggesting he look down on the city. Yes, he thought, it would be nice.

"Why not?" Hanley asked himself, and turned toward a building.

"Not that one," the radio whispered.

Hanley obediently passed by the building and stopped in front of the next.

"This one?" he queried.

The radio didn't answer. But Hanley caught the barest hint of an approving little grunt.

Well, he thought, you had to hand it to the Romance Service. They seemed to know what they were doing. His movements were as nearly spontaneous as any guided movements could be.

ENTERING the building, Hanley stepped into the self-service elevator and punched for

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the top floor. From there, he climbed a short flight of stairs to the roof. Once outside, he began walking toward the west side of the building.

"Other side," whispered the radio.

Hanley turned and walked to the other side. There he looked out over the city, at the orderly rows of street lights, white and faintly haloed. Dotted here and there were the reds and greens of traffic lights, and the occasional colored blotch of an electric sign. His city stretched before him, infinite in its possibilities, rich in promise, devoid of fulfillment.

Suddenly he became aware of another person on the roof, staring raptly at the spectacle of lights.

"Excuse me," said Hanley. "Didn't mean to intrude."

"You didn't," the person said, and Hanley realized he was talking to a woman.

We are strangers, Hanley thought. A man and a woman who meet by accident — or fate — on a dark rooftop overlooking the city. He wondered how many dreams the Romance Service had analyzed, how many visions they had tabulated, to produce something as perfect as this.

Glancing at the girl, he saw that she was young and lovely. Despite her outward composure, he sensed how the rightness of this meeting, the place, the time, the mood stirred her as it did him.

He thought furiously, but could find nothing to say. No words came to him and the moment was drifting away.

"The lights," prompted his radio.

"The lights are beautiful," said Hanley, feeling foolish.

"Yes," murmured the girl. "Like a great carpet of stars, or spearpoints in the gloom."

"Like sentinels," said Hanley, "keeping eternal vigil in the night." He wasn't sure if the idea was his or if he was parroting a barely perceptible voice from the radio.

"I often come here," said the girl.

"I never come here," Hanley said.

"But tonight . . ."

"Tonight I had to come. I knew I would find you."

Hanley felt that the Romance Service needed a better script writer. Such dialogue, in broad daylight, would be ridiculous. But now, on a high rooftop overlooking the city, with lights flashing below and the stars very close overhead, it was the most natural conversation in the world.

"I do not encourage strangers," said the girl, taking a step toward him. "But — "

"I am no stranger," Hanley

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said, moving toward her.

The girl's pale blonde hair glinted with starlight. Her lips parted. She looked at him, her features transfigured by the mood, the atmosphere and the soft, flattering light.

They stood face to face and Hanley could smell her faint perfume and the fragrance of her hair. His knees became weak and confusion reigned within him.

"Take her in your arms," the radio whispered.

Automatonlike, Hanley held out his arms. The girl entered them with a little sigh. They kissed — simply, naturally, inevitably, and with a mounting and predictable passion.

Then Hanley noticed the tiny jeweled transistor radio on the girl's lapel. In spite of it, he had to admit that the meeting was not only spontaneous and fateful, but enormously pleasant as well.

DAWN was touching the skyscrapers when Hanley returned to his apartment and tumbled, exhausted, into bed. He slept all day and awoke toward evening, ravenously hungry. He ate dinner in a neighborhood bar and considered the events of the previous night.

It had been wild, perfect and wonderful, all of it — the meeting on the roof and, later, her warm and darkened apartment; and at last his departure at dawn, with her drowsy kiss still warm on his mouth. But despite all this, Hanley was disturbed.

He couldn't help feeling a little odd about a romantic meeting set up and sponsored by transistor radios, which cued lovers into the proper spontaneous yet fated responses. It was undoubtedly clever but something about it seemed wrong.

He visualized a million young men in gray flannel suits and striped regimental ties, roaming the streets of the city in response to the barely heard commands of a million tiny radios. He pictured the radio operators at their central two-way videophone switchboard—earnest, hard-working people, doing their night's work at romance, then buying a newspaper and taking a subway home to the husband or wife and kids.

This was distasteful. But he had to admit that it was better than no romance at all. These were modern times. Even romance had to be put on a sound organizational basis or get lost in the shuffle.

Besides, Hanley thought, was it really so strange? In medieval times, a witch gave a knight a charm, which led him to an enchanted lady. Today, a salesman gave a man a transistor radio, which did the same thing and

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probably a lot faster.

Quite possibly, he thought, there has never been a truly spontaneous and fated romance. Perhaps the thing always requires a middleman.

Hanley cast further thoughts out of his mind. He paid for his dinner and went out for a walk.

THIS time, his firm and hurried steps led him into a poorer section of the city. Here garbage cans lined the sidewalks, and from the dirty tenement windows came the sound of a melancholy clarinet, and the shrill voices of women raised in argument. A cat, striped and agate-eyed, peered at him from an alleyway and darted out of sight.

Hanley shivered, stopped, and decided to return to his own part of the city.

"Why not walk on?" the radio urged him, speaking very softly, like a voice in his head.

Hanley shivered again and walked on.

The streets were deserted now and silent as a tomb. Hanley hurried past gigantic windowless warehouses and shuttered stores. Some adventures, it seemed to him, were not worth the taking. This was hardly a suitable locale for romance. Maybe he should ignore the radio and return to the bright, well-ordered world he knew—

He heard a sound of scuffling feet. Glancing down a narrow alley, he saw three wrestling figures. Two were men and the third, trying to break free, was a girl.

Hanley's reaction was instantaneous. He tensed to sprint away and find a policeman, preferably two or three. But the radio stopped him.

"You can handle them," the radio said.

Like hell I can, Hanley thought. The newspapers were full of stories about men who thought they could handle muggers. They usually had plenty of time to brood over their fistic shortcomings in a hospital.

But the radio urged him on. And touched by a sense of destiny, moved by the girl's plaintive cries, Hanley removed his horn-rimmed glasses, put them in their case, put the case into a hip pocket, and plunged into the black maw of the alley.

He ran full into a garbage can, knocked it over and reached the struggling group. The muggers hadn't noticed him yet. Hanley seized one by the shoulder, turned him and lashed out with his right fist. The man staggered back against the wall. His friend released the girl and went for Hanley, who struck out with both hands and his right foot.

The man went down, grumbling, "Take it easy, buddy."

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Hanley turned back to the first mugger, who came at him like a wildcat. Surprisingly, the man's entire fusillade of blows missed and Hanley knocked him down with a single well-placed left.

The two men scrambled to their feet and fled. As they ran, Hanley could hear one complain to the other, "Ain't this a hell of a way to make a living?"

Ignoring this break in the script, Hanley turned to the girl.

She leaned against him for support. "You came," she breathed.

"I had to," said Hanley, in response to a barely audible radio voice.

"I know," she murmured.

Hanley saw that she was young and lovely. Her black hair glinted with lamplight. Her lips parted. She looked at him, her features transfigured by the mood, the atmosphere and the soft, flattering light.

This time, Hanley needed no command from the tiny radio to take her into his arms. He was learning the form and content of the romantic adventure and the proper manner of conducting a spontaneous yet fated affair.

They departed at once for her apartment. And as they walked, Hanley noticed a large jewel glittering in her black hair.

It wasn't until much later that he realized it was a tiny, artfully disguised transistor radio.

NEXT evening, Hanley was out again, walking the streets and trying to quiet a small voice of dissatisfaction within him. It had been a perfect night, he reminded himself, a night of tender shadows, soft hair brushing his eyes and tears warm upon his shoulder. And yet . . .

The sad fact remained that this girl hadn't been his type, any more than the first girl had been. You simply can't throw strangers together at random and expect the fiery, quick romance to turn into love. Love has its own rules and enforces them rigidly.

So Hanley walked, and the conviction grew within him that tonight he was going to find love. For tonight the horned moon hung low over the city and a southern breeze carried the mingled scent of spice and nostalgia.

Aimlessly he wandered, for his transistor radio was silent. No command brought him to the little park at the river's edge and no secret voice urged him to approach the solitary girl standing there.

He stood near her and contemplated the scene. To his left was a great bridge, its girders faint and spidery in the darkness. The river's oily black water slid past, ceaselessly twisting and turning. A tug hooted and another

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replied, wailing like ghosts lost in the night.

His radio gave him no hint. So Hanley said, "Nice night."

"Maybe," said the girl, not turning. "Maybe not."

"The beauty is there," Hanley said, "if you care to see it."

"What a strange thing to say . . ."

"Is it?" Hanley asked, taking a step toward her. "Is it really strange? Is it strange that I'm here? And that you are here?"

"Perhaps not," the girl said, turning at last and looking into Hanley's face.

She was young and lovely. Her bronze hair glinted with moonlight and her features were transfigured by the mood, the atmosphere and the soft, flattering light.

Her lips parted in wonder.

And then Hanley knew.

THIS adventure was truly fated and spontaneous! The radio had not guided him to this place, had not whispered cues and responses for him to murmur. And looking at the girl, Hanley could see no tiny transistor radio on her blouse or in her hair.

He had met his love, without assistance from the New York Romance Service! At last, his dark and fitful visions were coming true.

He held out his arms. With the faintest sigh, she came into them. They kissed, while the lights of the city flashed and mingled with the stars overhead, and the crescent moon dipped in the sky, and foghorns hooted mournful messages across the oily black river.

Breathlessly, the girl stepped back. "Do you like me?" she asked.

"Like you!" exclaimed Hanley. "Let me tell you – "

"I'm so glad," said the girl, "because I am your Free Introductory Romance, given as a sample by Greater Romance Industries, with home offices in Newark, New Jersey. Only our firm offers romances which are truly spontaneous and fated. Due to our technological researches, we are able to dispense with such clumsy apparatus as transistor radios, which lend an air of rigidity and control where no control should be apparent. We are happy to have been able to please you with this sample romance.

"But remember – this is only a sample, a taste, of what Greater Romance Industries, with branch offices all over the world, can offer you. In this brochure, sir, several plans are outlined. You might be interested in the *Romance in Many Lands* package, or, if you are of an enterprising imagination, perhaps the piquant *Romance through the Ages* package is for you. Then there is the

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regular City Plan and—"

She slipped a brightly illustrated pamphlet into Hanley's hand. Hanley stared at it, then at her. His fingers opened and the brochure fluttered to the ground.

"Sir! I trust we haven't offended you!" the girl cried. "These businesslike aspects of romance are necessary, but quickly over. Then everything is purely spontaneous and fateful. You receive your bill each month in a plain, unmarked envelope and—"

But Hanley had turned from her and was running down the street. As he ran, he plucked the tiny transistor radio from his lapel and hurled it into a gutter.

FURTHER attempts at salesmanship were wasted on Hanley. He telephoned an aunt of his, who immediately and with twittering excitement arranged a date for him with a daughter of one of her oldest friends. They met in his aunt's overdecorated parlor and talked in halting sentences for three hours, about the weather, college, business, politics, and friends they might have in common. And Hanley's beaming aunt hurried in and out of the brightly lighted room, serving coffee and homemade cake.

Something about this stiff, formal, anachronistic setup must have been peculiarly right for the two young people. They progressed to regular dates and were married after a courtship of three months.

It is interesting to note that Hanley was among the last to find a wife in the old, unsure, quaint, haphazard, unindustrialized fashion. For the Service Companies saw at once the commercial potentialities of Hanley's Mode, graphed the effects of embarrassment upon the psyche, and even assessed the role of the Aunt in American Courtship.

And now one of the Companies' regular and most valued services is to provide bonded aunts for young men to call up, to provide these aunts with shy and embarrassed young girls, and to produce a proper milieu for all this in the form of a bright, overdecorated parlor, an uncomfortable couch, and an eager old lady bustling back and forth at meticulously unexpected intervals with coffee and homemade cake.

The suspense, they say, becomes almost overpowering.

—FINN O'DONNEVAN

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

HIS MONKEY WIFE by John Collier. Doubleday & Co., Inc., N. Y. $3.75

THOUGH it starts out seemingly as a gag, Collier's first novel takes on more and more a straight face until, at the denouement, the reader is quasi-or possibly queasy-convinced that Collier is speaking his true mind. In any event, we owe a debt to Doubleday for bringing back this book, first published in 1931.

An English missionary, accreting a dowry in the African jungle for his reluctant bride-to-be back home, has adopted a female chimpanzee as pet, not knowing that she is most extraordinary. She has taught herself to read, but her attempt to learn writing in her master's native school led to a traumatic experience from which her self-confidence never recovered.

Returning to civilization after five years to prepare for his coming nuptials, her master takes her with him. Unfortunately, she has fallen in love with him and has correctly estimated the falsity of his beloved's affection. It isn't for

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me to tell how she outwits her human rival. Just see for yourself!

THE HUNGER AND OTHER STORIES by Charles Beaumont. G. P. Putnam's Sons, N. Y., $3.50

BEAUMONT is one of the rising stars in the newer group of solid talents. In this, his first collection, only "The Crooked Man" is S-F, the rest fantasy or straight fiction. "Black Country" is a towering horror story of a Negro jazz ensemble. There are several other striking yarns—"Miss Gentilbelle" and "Last Night The Rain" are a couple that you won't soon forget.

EASTER ISLAND by Alfred Métraux. Oxford University Press, N. Y., $5.00

UNFORTUNATELY for an entire school of writers, most authorities are now in agreement that the famous monoliths of Easter Island are not relics of the inundation of the lost continent, Mu. There is disagreement as to who did erect the monuments, but virtually none concerning their proper age, which is measured in mere hundreds of years.

Dr. Métraux, an anthropologist, spent a half year on the island with the intent of proving that the ancestors of the present inhabitants were the mysterious sculptors. This he did to his own and, possibly, your satisfaction. To him, the amazing thing is that such a tiny, poverty-stricken community could build monuments worthy of a great and wealthy nation.

SOMETIME, NEVER by William Golding, John Wyndham, Mervyn Peake. Ballantine Books, N. Y., $2.00

THIS group of novellas by three topflight English authors is as exciting as a letter from the future.

Golding is the author of last year's marvelously off-trail novel, *Lord of the Flies.* His story of the past, "Envoy Extraordinary," is a glittering writing job concerning a barbaric genius and the inventions he offers to a cagy old Caesar. The Emperor, a wise ruler holding power tenaciously through wile rather than force, can see the advantages, but also, shrewd man, the disadvantages. Which makes an amusing story of power politics, subtle counter-measures and a surprise ending.

Wyndham's "Consider Her Ways" is a well-done variation of the old human-hive, queen-bee yarn in which males have become extinct. A workmanlike job, but without the smashing impact of the Golding or "Boy in Darkness" by Mervyn Peake.

The latter is a nightmarish story of such unique quality that I find it hard to believe that no American

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publisher has printed Peake's prior yarns, *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*. Don't miss this!

COLONIAL SURVEY by Murray Leinster. Gnome Press, Inc., N. Y., $3.00

THE years may pass and the names of the S-F greats may change, but Leinster, bless him, makes like Ol' Man Ribber. His current "novel," a somewhat disjointed collection of four separate tales with common hero from ASF, is the gadget story raised to new heights.

Basically, this is the type of yarn that flourished during the First Decade. Leinster's flesh-and-blood humans make an interesting contrast to, for instance, Arcot, Wade and Morey, three of the greatest gadgeteers. Leinster pulls his miracles out of a hat labeled Deus ex perspiration and makes them completely credible. First rate.

THE 27th DAY by John Mantley. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., N. Y., $3.50

THE premise of this book makes difficult swallowing. As in Clarke's *Childhood's End,* we are contacted by an infinitely superior race. However, their function is not nursemaid but sowers of destructive seed. Their home sun is going Nova momentarily, but owing to their ethical standards, they cannot arbitrarily expropriate an inhabited planet. They have selected five persons of different nationalities, snatched them to their craft and presented each with a kit containing golden pellets of enormous destructive potential. If Earth has not destroyed two-thirds of its population in 27 days (note title), the Invaders will leave. The kits are attuned to the minds of their bearers and cannot be opened by others.

The five — American, English girl, Chinese ditto, Russian soldier and German scientist—make a mutual pact not to disclose the secret of their kits. Things, of course, are not that simple. After all, this is a yarn about Super-Dupers.

QUEST FOR A CONTINENT by Walter Sullivan. McGraw-Hill, N. Y., Toronto, London, $5.50

BECAUSE of Admiral Byrd's death this past March and the imminent Geophysical Year, Antarctica is right up there in general interest. For those who would like to bone up on the frigid continent's history, Sullivan's book is as good an encyclopedia as can be found. In important addition, it reads like a novel.

The author has humanized the gigantic mass of cold data to the point that his reader is right there

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when the helpless Oates of Scott's doomed expedition, hands and feet frozen, sacrificed himself with the words, "I am just going outside and may be some time." Or the heart-rending final entries of Robert Scott: "It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more."

You may manage to tear yourself away from Sullivan's book, but not easily.

HOW LIFE BEGAN by Irving Adler. The John Day Co., N. Y., $2.95

ASIDE from the cosmic question of the origin of the Universe itself, perhaps the most fundamental problem Man has faced has been that of his own origin. That, of course, is of a piece with the problem of the source of Life itself. Adler's book is a step-by-step demonstration of how simple molecules can become complex, like the protein molecules, the smallest known being as heavy as 13,000 hydrogen atoms and the largest known as heavy as some 10,000,000 hydrogen atoms.

The basic secret of life is the ability of the carbon atom to combine with other elements. The reader, who needs no special knowledge to enjoy this text, will be astounded to learn that, according to Adler, life on this planet was inevitable!

THE MILKY WAY by Bart J. Bok & Priscilla F. Bok. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, $5.50

EXCEPT for Sun and Moon, the most spectacular aspect of the heavens is the Milky Way. This third edition of a deservedly popular work on our Galaxy is a beauty, lucidly written and with some of the finest photographic reproductions extant.

THE THREE LIVES OF NAOMI HENRY, by Henry Blythe. The Citadel Press, N. Y., $3.00

SINCE the furore raised by Bridey has subsided, books on reincarnation have slowed to a trickle. This latecomer outdoes singular Bridey. In fact, in an epilogue, the author hints that further experimentation will disclose *seven* lives of Naomi Henry instead of just three. Now that's really living!

— FLOYD C. GALE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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BREAK A LEG

By JIM HARMON

The man worth while couldn't be allowed to smile . . . if he ever laughed at himself, the entire ship and crew were as good as dead!

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

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IF THERE is anything I am afraid of, and there probably is, it is having a rookie Accident Prone, half-starved from the unemployment lines, aboard my spaceship. They are always so anxious to please. They remember what it is like to live in a rathole behind an apartment house furnace eating day-old bread and wilted vegetables, which doesn't compare favorably to the Admiralty-style staterooms and steak and caviar they draw down in the Exploration Service.

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You may wonder why anybody should make things so pleasant for a grownup who can't walk a city block without tripping over his own feet and who has a very low life expectancy on Earth due to the automobiles they are constantly stepping in front of and the live wires they are fond of picking up so the street won't be littered.

The Admiralty, however, is a very thorough group of men. Before they open a planet to colonization or even fraternization, they insist on knowing just what they are up against.

Accident Prones can find out what is wrong with a planet as easily as falling off a log, which they will if there is one lonely tree on the whole world. A single pit of quicksand on a veritable Eden of a planet and a Prone will be knee-deep in it within an hour of blastdown. If an alien race will smile patronizingly on your heroic attempts at genocide, but be offended into a murderous religious frenzy if you blow your nose, you can take the long end of the odds that the Prone will almost immediately catch a cold.

All of this is properly recorded for the next expedition in the Admiralty files, and if it's any consolation, high officials and screen stars often visit you in the hospital.

CHARLIE Baxter was like all of the other Prones, only worse. Moran III was sort of an unofficial test for him and he wanted to make good. We had blasted down in the black of night and were waiting for daylight to begin our re-survey of the planet. It was Charlie's first assignment, so we had an easy one — just seeing if anything new had developed in the last fifty years.

Baxter's guard was doubled as soon as we set down, of course, and that made him fidgety. He had heard all the stories about how high the casualty rate was with Prones aboard spaceships and now he was beginning to get nervous.

Actually Charlie was safer in space than he would be back on Earth with all those cars and people. We could have told him how the Service practically never lost a Prone—they were too valuable and rare to lose — but we did not want him to stop worrying. The precautions we took to safeguard him, the armed men who went with him everywhere, the Accident Prone First Aid Kit with spare parts for him, blood, eyes, bone, nerves, arms, legs, and so forth, only emphasized to him the danger, not the rigidly secured safety.

We like it that way.

No one knows what causes an accident prone. The big insurance

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companies on Earth discovered them when they found out in the last part of the nineteenth century that ninety per cent of the accidents were happening to a few per cent of the people. They soon found out that these people were not malingering or trying to defraud anybody; they simply had accidents.

I suppose everything from psychology to extra-sensory perception has been used to explain or explain away prones. I have my own ideas. I think an accident prone is simply a super-genius with a super-doubt of himself.

I believe accident prones have a better system of calculation than a cybernetic machine. They can take *everything* into consideration — the humidity, their blood sugar, the expression on the other guy's face — and somewhere in the corners and attic of their brain they *infallibly* make the *right* choice in any given situation. Then, because they are incapable of trusting themselves, they do exactly the opposite.

I felt a little sorry for Charlie Baxter, but I was Captain of the *Hilliard* and my job was to keep him worried and trying. The worst thing that can happen is for a Prone to give up and let himself sink into the fate of being a Prone. He will wear the rut right down into a tomb.

Accident Prones have to stay worried and thinking, trying to break out of the jinx that traps them. Usually they come to discover this themselves, but by then, if they are real professionals with a career in the Service, they have framed the right attitude and they keep it.

BAXTER was a novice and very much of an amateur at the game. He didn't like the scoring system, but he was attached to the equipment and didn't want to lose it.

His clumsiness back on Earth had cost him every decent job he ever had. He had come all the way down the line until he was rated eligible only for the position of Prone aboard a spaceship. He had been poor — hungry, cold, wet, poor — and now he had luxury of a kind almost no one had in our era. He was drunk with it, passionately in love with it. It would cease to be quite so important after a few years of regular food, clean clothes and a solid roof to keep out the rain. But right now I knew he would come precariously close to killing to keep it. Or to being killed.

He was ready to work.

I knocked politely on his hatch and straightened my tunic. I have always admired the men who can look starched in a uniform. Mine always seemed to wrinkle as soon as I put them around my raw-

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boned frame. Sometimes it is hard for me to keep a military appearance or manner. I got my commission during the Crisis ten years back, because of my work in the reserve unit that I created out of my employees in the glass works (glassware blown to order for laboratories).

Someone said something through the door and I went inside.

Bronoski looked at me over the top of his picture tape from where he lay on the sofa. No one else was in the compartment.

"Where is Baxter?" I asked the hulking guard. My eyes were on the sofa. My own bed pulled out of the wall and was considerably inferior to this, much less Baxter's bed in the next cabin. But then I am only a captain.

Bronoski swung his feet off the couch and stood more or less in what I might have taken for attention if I hadn't known him better. "Sidney and Elliot escorted him down to the men's room, Captain Jackson."

"You mean," I said very quietly, "that he isn't in his own bath?"

"No sir," Bronoski said wearily. "He told us it was out of order."

I stifled the gurgle of rage that came into my throat and motioned Bronoski to follow me. The engines on the *Hilliard* were more likely to be out of order than the plumbing in the Accident Prone's suite. No effort was spared to insure comfort for the key man in the whole crew.

One glance inside the compartment at the end of the corridor satisfied me. There wasn't a thing wrong with the plumbing, so Baxter must have had something in mind.

On a hunch of my own, I checked the supply lockers next to the airlock while Bronoski fired questions at my back. Three translator collars were missing. Baxter had left the spaceship and gone off into an alien night.

Elliot and Sidney, the guards, were absolutely prohibited from interfering in any way with a Prone's decisions. They merely had to follow him and give their lives to save his, if necessary.

I grabbed up a translator collar and tossed one to Bronoski. Then, just as we were getting into the airlock, I remembered something and ran back to the bridge.

The thick brown envelope I had left on my desk was gone. I had shown it to Baxter and informed him that he should study it when he felt so inclined. He has seemed bored with the idea then, but he had come back for the report before leaving the ship. The envelope contained the exploration survey on Moran III made some fifty years before.

I unlocked a desk drawer with

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my thumb print and drew out a duplicate of the report. I didn't have too much confidence in it and I hoped Charlie Baxter had less. Lots of things can change on a planet in fifty years, including its inhabitants.

BRONOSKI picked up Baxter's tracks and those of the two guards, Elliot and Sidney, with ultra-violet light. They were cold splotches of green fire against the rotting black peat of the jungle path. The whole dark, tangled mess smelled of sour mash, an intoxicating bourbon-type aroma.

I jogged along following the big man more by instinct than anything else, ruining my eyes in an effort to refresh my memory as to the contents of the survey report in the cheery little glow from my cigarette lighter.

The lighter was beginning to feel hot to my fingers and I started to worry about radiation leak, although they are supposed to be guaranteed perfectly shielded. I read that before the last exploration party had left, they had made the Moranite natives blood brothers. Then Bronoski knocked me down.

Actually he put his hands in the small of my back and shoved politely but firmly. Just the same, I went face down into the moist dirt fast enough.

I raised my head cautiously to see if Bronoski would shove it back down. He didn't.

I could see through the stringy, alcoholic grass fairly well and there were Baxter, Elliot and Sidney in the middle of a curious mob of aliens.

Charlie Baxter had got pretty thin on his starvation diet back on Earth. He had grown a slight pot belly on the good food he drew down as Prone, but he was a fairly nice-looking young fellow. He looked even better in the pale moonlight, mixed amber and chartreuse from the twin satellites, and in contrast to the rest of the group.

Elliot Charterson and Sidney Von Elderman were more or less type-cast as brawny, brainless bodyguards. Their friends described them as muscle-bound apes, but other people sometimes got insulting.

The natives were less formidable. They made the slight lump of fat Charlie had at his waist look positively indecent.

The natives were *skinny*. How skinny? Well, the only curves they had in their bodies were their bulging eyeballs. But just because they were thin didn't mean they were pushovers. Whips and garrotes aren't fat and these looked just as dangerous.

Whenever I see aliens who are so humanoid, I remember all that

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Sunday supplement stuff about the Galaxy being colonized sometime by one humanlike race and the Ten Lost Tribes and so forth.

They didn't give me much time to think about it just then. The natives looked unhappy — belligerently unhappy.

I began to shake and at the same time to assure myself that I didn't have anything to worry about, that the precious Accident Prone would come out of it alive. After all, Elliot and Sidney were there to protect him. They had machine guns, flame-throwers, atomic grenades, and some really potent weapons. They could handle the situation. I didn't have a thing to worry about.

So why couldn't I stop shaking?

Maybe it was the way the natives were slowly but deliberately forming a circle about Charlie and his bodyguards.

THE clothing of the Moranites hadn't changed much, I noticed. That was understandable. They had a non-mechanical civilization with scattered colonies that it would take a terrestrial season to tour by animal cart.

An isolated culture like that couldn't change many of its customs. Then Charlie shouldn't have any trouble if he stuck to the findings on behavior in the report. Naturally, that meant by now he had discovered the fatal error.

The three men were just standing still, waiting for the aliens to make the first move. The natives looked just as worried as Charlie and his guards, but then that might have been their natural expression.

I jumped a little when the natives all began to talk at once. The mixture of sound was fed to me through my translator collar while the cybernetic unit back on board the spaceship tried decoding the words. It was too much of an overload and, infuriatingly, the sound was cut out altogether. I started to rip my collar off when the natives stopped screeching and a spokesman stepped forward.

The native slumped a little more than the others, as if he were more relaxed, and his eyes didn't goggle so much. He said, "We do not understand," and the translation came through fine.

Baxter swallowed and started forward to meet the alien halfway. His boot slipped on the wet scrub grass and I saw him do the desperate little dance to regain his balance that I had seen him make so many times; he could never stay on his feet.

Before he could perform his usual pratfall, Sidney and Elliot were at his sides, supporting him by his thin biceps. He glared at

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them and shrugged them off, informing them wordlessly that he would have regained his balance if they had given him half a chance.

"We do not understand," the native repeated. "Do you hold us in so much contempt as to claim *all* of us as your brothers?"

"All beings are brothers," Charlie said. "We were made blood brothers by your people and my people several hundred of your years ago."

Charlie's words were being translated into the native language, of course, but Bronoski's collars and mine switched them back into Terrestrial. I've read stories where explorers wearing translators couldn't understand each other, but that isn't the way it works. If you listen closely, you make out the words in your own language underneath, and if you pay very close attention, you can find minor sematic differences in the original words and the echo translated back from a native language.

I was trying to catch both versions from Charlie. I knew he was making a mistake and later I wanted to be sure I knew just what it was. Frankly, I would have used the blood-brother gambit myself. I had also read about it in the survey report, as I made a point of telling you. This just proves that Accident Prones haven't secured the franchise on mistakes. The difference is that I would have gone about it a lot more cautiously.

"Enough of this," the native said sharply. "Do you claim to be *my* brother?"

"Sure," Charlie said.

Dispassionately but automatically, the alien launched himself at the Prone's throat.

CHARTERSON and Von Elderman instantly went into action. Elliot Charterson jumped to Charlie's assistance while Sidney Von Elderman swung around to protect Charlie from the rest of the crowd.

But the defense didn't work.

The other aliens didn't try to get to Baxter, but when they saw Elliot start to interfere with the two writhing opponents, they clawed him down into the grass. Sidney had been set to defend the Prone, not his fellow guard. They might have been all right if he had pulled a few off Elliot and let him get to work, except his training told him that the life of a guard did not matter a twit, but that a Prone must be defended. He started toward Charlie Baxter and was immediately pulled down by a spare dozen of the mob.

It all meant one thing to me. The reaction of the crowd had been spontaneous, not planned.

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That meant that the struggle between Charlie and the spokesman was a high order of single combat with which it was unholy, indecent and dastardly to interfere.

I could fairly hear Bronoski's steel muscles preparing for battle as he saw his two mammoth pals go down under the press of numbers. A bristle-covered bullet of skull rose out of the grass beside me and it was my turn to grind his face in the muck.

I had a nice little problem to contend with.

I knew the reason Baxter had slipped out at night to be the first to greet the aliens. He was determined to be useful and necessary without fouling things up. I suppose Charlie had never felt valuable to anyone before in his life, but at the same time it hurt him to think that he was valuable only because he was a misfit.

He had decided to take a positive approach. If he did things right, that would be as good proof of conditions as if he made the mistakes he was supposed to do. But he couldn't lick that doubt of himself that had been ground into him since birth and there he was, in trouble as always.

Now maybe Bronoski and I could get him out ourselves by a direct approach, but Charlie would probably lose all self-confidence and sink down into accepting himself as an Accident Prone, a purely passive state.

We couldn't have that. We had to have Charlie acting and thinking and therefore making mistakes whose bad examples we could profit by.

As I lay on my belly thinking, Charlie was putting up a pretty good fight with the stringy native. He got in a few good punches, which seemed to mystify the native, who apparently knew nothing of boxing. Naturally Charlie then began wrestling a trained and deadly wrestler instead of continuing to box him.

I grabbed Bronoski by his puffy ear and hissed some commands into it. He fumbled out a book of matches and lit one for me. By the tiny flicker of light, I began tearing apart my lighter.

I SUPPOSE you have played "tickling the dragon's tail" when you were a kid. I did. I guess all kids have. You know, worrying around two lumps of fissionable material and just keeping them from uniting and making a critical mass that will result in an explosion or lethal radiation. I caught my oldest boy doing it one day back on Earth and gave him a good tanning for it. Actually I thought it showed he had a lot of grit. Every real boy likes to tickle the dragon's tail.

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Maybe I was a little old for it, but that's what I was doing there in the Moran III jungle.

I got the shield off my cigarette lighter and jerked out the dinky little damper rods for the pile and started easing the two little bricks toward each other with the point of my lead pencil.

I heard something that resembled a death rattle come from Charlie's throat as the fingers of the alien closed down on it and my hand twitched. A blooming light stabbed at my eyes and I flicked the lighter away from me.

The explosion was a dud.

It lit up the jungle for a radius of half a mile like a giant flashbulb, but it exploded only about ten times as loud as a pistol shot. The mass hadn't been slapped together hard enough or held long enough to do any real damage.

The natives weren't fools, though. They got out of there fast. I wished I could have gone with them. There was undoubtedly an unhealthy amount of radiation hanging around.

"Now!" I told Bronoski.

He ran into the clearing and found four bodies sprawled out: Charlie Baxter, his two guards and the native spokesman.

Charlie and the native were both technically unconscious, but they each had a stranglehold on each other, with Charlie getting the worst of it.

Bronoski pried the two of them apart.

While he roused Sidney and Elliot from their punch-drunk state, I examined Charlie. He had a nasty burn on his leg and two toes were gone. If there was an explosion anywhere around, he was bound to be in front of it.

He was abruptly choking and blinking watery eyes.

"You did it, Charlie," I lied. "You beat him fair and square."

CHARLIE was in bed for the next few days while his grafted toes grew on, but he didn't seem to mind.

We knew enough not to use the blood-brothers approach after fifty years and therefore it did not take us long to find out why we shouldn't.

The Moran III culture was isolated in small colonies, but we had forgotten that a generation of the intelligent life-forms was only three Earth months. It seems a waste at first thought, but all things are relative. The Crystopeds of New Lichtenstein, for instance, have a life span of twenty thousand Terrestrial years.

With so fast a turnover in Moran III individuals, there was bound to be a lot of variables introduced, resulting in change.

The idea that seemed to be in favor was the survival of the fittest. Since the natives were born

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in litters, with single births extremely rare, this concept was practiced from the first. Unless they were particularly cunning, the runts of the litter did not survive the first year and rarely more than one sibling ever saw adulthood.

Obviously, to claim to be a native's brother was to challenge him to a test of survival.

My men learned to call themselves Last Brother in the usual bragging preliminaries that preceded every encounter. We got pretty good results with that approach and learned a lot about the changes in customs in the half century. But finally one of the men – either Frank Peirmonte or Sidney Charterson, who both claim to be the one—thought of calling the crew a Family and right away we began hitting it off famously.

The Moranites figured we would kill each other off all except maybe one, whom they could handle themselves. They still had folk legends about the previous visit of Earthmen and they didn't trust us.

Charlie Baxter's original mistake had supplied us with the Rosetta Stone we needed.

Doctor Selby told me Charlie could get up finally, so I went to his suite and shook hands with him as he still lay in bed.

I waited for the big moment when Charlie would be on his feet again and we could get on with the re-survey of the planet.

"Here goes," Charlie said and threw back his sheet.

He swung his legs around and tottered to his feet. He was a little weak, but he took a few steps and seemed to make it okay.

Then the inevitable happened. He snagged the edge of one of the Persian carpets on the bedroom floor with his big toe and started to fall.

Selby and I both dived forward to catch him, but instead of doing the arm-waving dance for balance that we were both used to, he seemed to go limp and he plopped on the floor like a wet fish.

Immediately he jumped to his feet, grinning. "I finally learned to go limp when I take a fall, sir. It took a lot of practice. I imagine I'll save some broken bones that way."

"Yes," I said uneasily. "You have been thinking about this quite a lot while you lay there, haven't you, Baxter?"

"Yes, sir. I see I've been fighting this thing too hard. I am an Accident Prone and I might as well accept it. Why not? I seem to always muddle through some way, like out there in the jungle, so why should I worry or feel *embarrassed? I know I can't change* it."

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I WAS beginning to do some worrying of my own. Things weren't working out the way they should. We were supposed to see that Prones kept developing a certain amount of doomed self-confidence, but they couldn't be allowed to believe they were infallible Prones. A Prone's value lies in his active and constructive effort to do the right thing. If he merely accepts being a Prone, his accidents gain us nothing. We can't profit from mistakes that come about from resignation or laughing off blunders or, as in this case, conviction that he never got himself into anything he couldn't get himself out of.

"Doctor Selby, would you excuse us?" I asked.

The medic left with a bow and a surly expression. I turned to Baxter, rather wishing Selby could have stayed. It was a labor dispute and I was used to having a mediator present at bargaining sessions at my glassworks. But this was a military, not a civilian, spaceship.

"I have some facts of life to give you, Baxter," I told him. "It is your duty to *actively* fulfill your position. You have to make decisions and plan courses of action. Do you figure on just walking around in that jungle until a tree falls on you?"

He sat down on the edge of the bed and examined the pattern in the carpet. "Not exactly, sir. But I get tired of people waiting for me to make a fool out of myself. I have a natural talent for — for *Creative Negativism.* That's it. And I should be able to exercise my talent with *dignity.*"

"If you don't actively fulfill the obligations of a Prone, you aren't allowed the luxuries and privileges that go with the position. Do you think you would like to be without your armed guards to protect you every moment?"

"I can take care of myself, sir!"

I paused and came up with my best argument. "How would you like to live like an ordinary spaceman, without rare steaks and clean sheets? Because if you're not our Accident Prone, you're just another crew member, you know."

That one hurt him, but I saw I had put it to him as a challenge and he must have had some guilt feelings about accepting all that luxury for being nothing more than he was. "I could fulfill the duties of an ordinary spaceman, sir."

I snorted. "It takes skill and training, Baxter. Your papers entitle you to one position and one only anywhere — Accident Prone of a spaceship complement. If you refuse to do your duties in that post, you can only become a ward of the Galaxy."

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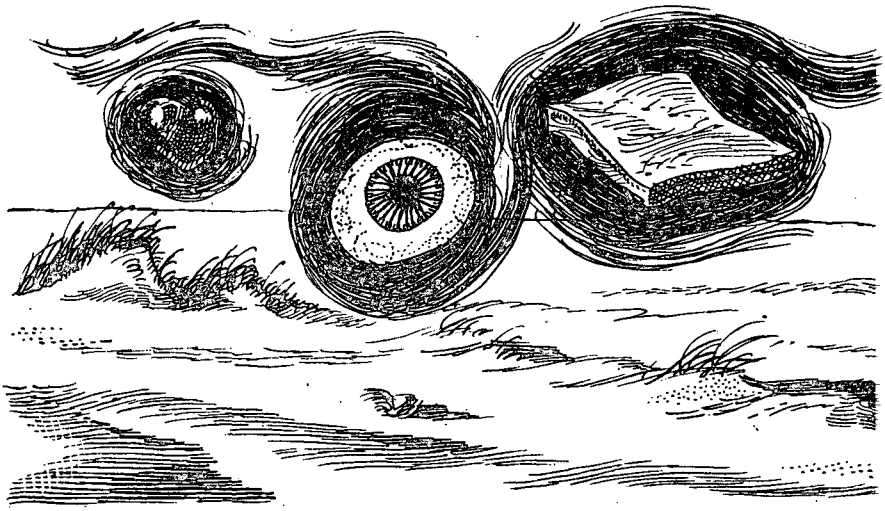

His jaw line firmed. He had gone through a lot to keep from taking such abject charity. "Isn't there," he asked in a milder tone, "*any* other position I could serve in on this ship, sir?"

I studied his face a moment. "We had to blast off without an Assistant Pile Driver, j.g. It keeps getting harder and harder to recruit an APD, j.g. I suppose it's those reports about the eventual fatalities due to radiation leak back there where they are stationed."

Baxter looked back at me steadily. "There are a lot of rumors about the high mortality rate among Accident Prones in space, too."

HE was right. We had started the rumors. We wanted the Prones alert, active and scheming to stay alive. More beneficial accidents that way. Actually, most Prones died of old age in space, which is more than could be said of them on Earth, where they didn't have the kind of protection the Service gives them.

"Look here, Baxter, do you like your quarters on this ship?" I demanded.

"You mean this master bedroom, the private heated swimming pool, the tennis court, bowling alley and all? Yes, sir, I like it."

"The Assistant Pile Driver has a cot near the fuel tanks."

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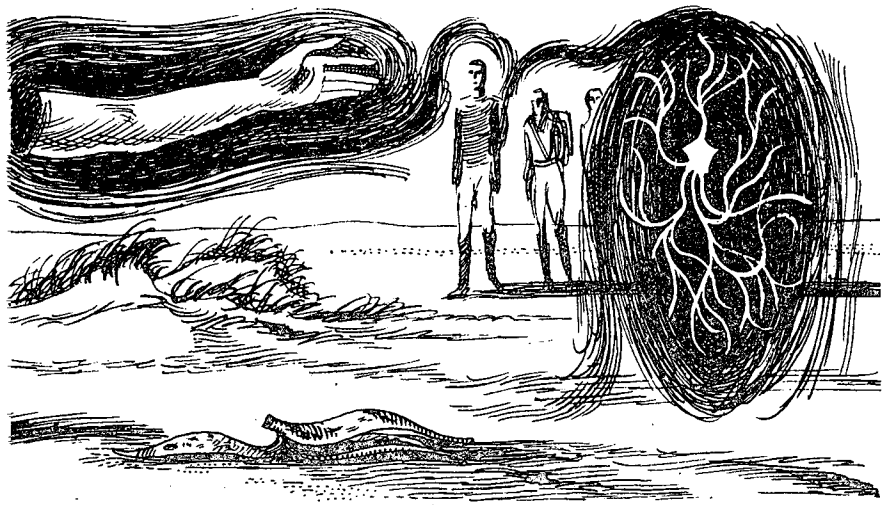

He gazed off over my left shoulder. "I had a bed behind the furnace back on Earth before the building I was working in burned down."

"You wouldn't like this one any better than the one before."

"But there I would have some chance of *advancement*. I don't want to be stuck in the rank of Accident Prone for life."

I stared at him in frank amazement. "Baxter, the only rank getting higher pay or more privileges than Prone is Grand Admiral of the Services, a position it would take you at least fifty years to reach if you had the luck and brains to make it, which you haven't."

"I had something more modest in mind, sir. Like being a captain."

He surely must have known how I lived in comparison to him, so I didn't bother to remind him. I said, "Have you ever seen a case of radiation poisoning?"

Baxter's jaw thrust forward. "It must be pretty bad – but it isn't as violent as being eaten by floating fungi or being swallowed in an earthquake on some airless satelite."

"No," I agreed, "it is much slower than any of those. It is unfortunate that we don't carry the necessary supplies to take care of Pile Drivers. Most of our medical supplies are in the Accident

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Prone First Aid Kit, for the exclusive use of the Prone. Have you ever taken a good look at that?"

Baxter shivered. "Yes, I've seen it. Several drums of blood, Type AB, my type. A half-dozen fresh-frozen assorted arms and legs, several rows of eyes, a hundred square feet of graftable skin, and a well-stocked tank of inner organs and a double-doored bank of nerve lengths. Impressive."

I smiled. "Sort of gives you a feeling of confidence and security, doesn't it? It would be unfortunate for anyone who had a great many accidents to be denied the supplies in that Kit, I should think. Of course, it is available only to those filling the position of Accident Prone and doing the work faithfully and according to orders."

"Yes, sir," Charlie mumbled.

"Selby is your personal physician, you realize," I drove on. "He takes care of the rest of us only if he has time left over from you. Why, when I was having my two weeks in the summer as an Ensign, I had to lie for half an hour with a crushed foot while the doctor sprayed our Prone's throat to guard against infection. Let me tell you, I was in quite a bit of pain."

Charlie's pale eyes narrowed as if he had just made a sudden discovery, perhaps about the relationship between us. "You don't make as much money as I do, do you, sir? You don't have a valet? And your bed folds into the bulkhead?"

I thought he was at last beginning to get it. "Yes," I said.

He stood sharply to attention. "Request transfer to position of Assistant Pile Driver, j.g., sir."

I barely halted a groan. He thought I resented him and was deliberately holding him down into the miserable overpaid, overfed job that was beneath him and the talents that so fitted him for the job.

"Request granted."

He would learn.

He had better.

I started to sweat in a gush. He had *really* better.

I TOOK him into the rear of the ship and showed him where he would sleep. In the oily gloom, he regarded the pad from an old acceleration couch fitted to two scratched and nicked aluminum pipes jury-rigged between two squat tanks containing water for the atomic pile used close to planets where the gravitational field interfered with the star-drive.

"Over here's what you have to keep an eye on, Baxter," I told him.

We walked past the dimly lighted rows of towering fuel lines

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and cables. Charlie tripped over the hump of a deck-level cable housing. His knee banged against the deck plates and he stood with an effort.

"Careful," I said. "Now that you have limited medical attention, don't break a leg."

Baxter rubbed his leg thoughtfully. "Funny. My grandfather used to be in show business. He told me that telling somebody to break a leg was wishing them good luck."

I cleared my throat. "It would seem in dubious taste, addressed to an accident prone. However, you have my best wishes. You realize that your salary as Prone of 11,000 credits a month and your pay of 23 credits a month as an APD, j.g., are suspended until the Admiralty rules on your case."

"Yes, sir. I realize that, sir."

I stopped him in front of the soiled red box that was the tension gauge. "If the electrical control of the drive somehow becomes broken, the interrupted circuit will show on the gauge. It is then the duty of the APD, j.g., to go through the small airlock and maintain manual control of the pile while at least one of the control circuits is repaired. The job rarely has to be done, but when it is, it is very often fatal."

Baxter only nodded. "I understand."

I doubted that he did.

After leaving Baxter on his first watch, I went to the messhall and waited for him to show up. The men knew what to do when he came.

It was rather pleasant to sit there savoring the odors. At times, they still seem more like those of a chemical laboratory than a kitchen, but I have become so used to associating burning starch products, centrifuged tannic acid, and melting dextrose with food that I am almost immune to the aroma of Prone food like juicy, sizzling steak. Almost.

CHARLIE Baxter finally came through the hatch. He paused and seemed to shake off what he must have thought was some olfactory hallucination and started to sit down at the table with the rest of the men. He looked rather pleased. He had probably decided being Accident Prone had deprived him of much of the company he had every right to enjoy with his shipmates.

"Get out of here!" Frank Peirmonte yelled, jumping up from the other end of the oblong table.

"Why?" Baxter asked in astonishment.

"Baxter," I put in, "I'm afraid the men think they may catch radiation fever from a pile driver like you."

"Catch radiation fever?" he re-

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peated. "Men have been exposed to atomics for hundred of years. Surely you men must know any poisoning in one individual can't be transmitted to another like germs. I couldn't absorb enough radiation to be dangerous to you in simple proximity and still be alive. Don't you see that?"

At once, all of my crew at the table covered their faces with their arms.

"Don't look at us!" Bronoski screamed, his voice knifing toward the higher octaves.

Baxter gaped in a daze from one of us to the other. "What do you mean? Why shouldn't I look at you?"

"You've got The Eye! *All* pile drivers get it."

"But I have to eat," he objected. "I'm hungry. Really I am."

I swung around and exchanged a few words with Tan Eck, the cook, at the rear hatch. I took a steaming tray and went across the compartment, averting my face.

"You will have to forgive these superstitious spacemen," I apologized to Baxter. "You go right ahead and eat just outside the door. I won't mind a bit."

"Thanks," Baxter said, accepting the plate. He looked down at the white paste, black gum and cup of yellowish liquid fitted in the proper holes and slots, then up at me. "What is this stuff?"

"You don't have to look right at me!" I snapped. "It is standard spaceman's fare — re-reconstituted carbohydrates, protein and hot ground roasted soya. This is stuff we had left over on our plates from lunch, all set to go into the converter, but Tan Eck reprocessed it for you. It's what regulations specify for an APD, j.g."

Baxter opened his mouth and closed it hard. "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

He turned smartly to leave and I halted him with a palm up. "Baxter."

He turned. "Yes, sir?"

"We are moving to the other side of the continent to continue with the re-survey. I want to make it clear to you that you are absolutely forbidden to leave the ship. We can't spare the guards for your liabilities, now that you have thrown away your value."

"Yes, sir."

Even at the time, I was gratified by the sudden thoughtful narrowing of his eyes.

II

I WASN'T surprised the next day when Bronoski reported that Charlie Baxter had taken a bacpac — food, soap, blankets and so forth — and left the *Hilliard*. He was determined to prove that he wasn't merely Accident Prone and could get things done on this own.

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"Charterson and Von Elderman are following him?" I asked.

Bronoski nodded his bullet-shaped head. "Like a hawk."

"The Bird can follow him like a hawk. I want them to follow him like men."

"They are as good at the job as I am," Bronoski reassured me.

"I think," I said quickly, "that I had better go down to Communications and follow Baxter myself."

The Bird was an electronic device. It looked like a local life-form that was actually a flying mammal. Inside the thing was was a sensitive video camera and a self-propulsion unit.

The Bird homed in on Baxter's electroencephalograph waves.

The view on the screen in front of the lounging chairs was clear but monotonous.

Charlie made his way across the landscape, woods on this side of the continent, not jungle, without incident. He did fall down like a wet laundry bag every so often, but that, as you'd figure, amounted to traveling across country without incident. He'd have done the same on a smooth pavement.

I had a cigarette in my mouth, futilely pounding my pockets for the lighter I didn't have, when Charlie met the alien.

There was only one native this time, the same thin form, but more lightly clothed here. I shifted uneasily and hoped the two guards were close. There was only one this time, but it was useless to suppose Charlie could handle him himself.

"Greetings," Charlie said. "I am Big Brother of a new Family."

There was no sound equipment in the Bird, but the translator circuits in the control board read Baxter's lips and produced their sound patterns for us. They would also translate the native's language, but just then he wasn't saying anything.

He walked around the Prone leisurely, as if considering buying him.

Charlie shifted the straps of his pack. He hadn't been convinced of his own abilities enough to take along a gun or any other kind of weapon. He would be almost sure to kill himself with it.

Or would he?

I suddenly wondered if Charlie doubted himself enough to commit outright suicide. He had had plenty of close calls, yet he had always survived. If his goal was self-destruction, he surely would have reached it after this many opportunities.

I watched the screen intently.

Charlie thought he was alone there with a possibly hostile native. All he had to do was make one small slip and he would be

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dead. Yet, so far, he had followed the pattern we had used at the other colony exactly.

Instantly I realized that it *must* be a mistake to follow the other pattern with this second group of aliens, if Charlie Baxter did it.

AT first I couldn't understand why the pattern should be wrong for this group if it was right for the first. They were close enough so that there must have been intercourse between them, and if customs were violently different, there would probably be a state of warfare between them and none was apparent.

I finally realized why warfare would be almost impossible and why the customs of the separated colonies might be extremely at odds.

The colonies were three months apart by fastest transportation, which was longer than a generation of the natives. No one could live long enough to reach a second colony, so each culture developed in isolation along entirely random lines.

I felt like yelling at Charlie. There was literally no way of telling how he might be offending and antagonizing this Moranite by treating him as we had learned to treat the others.

The alien finally spoke. "You are part of a — Family?"

Charlie nodded his head.

So did the native — he bobbed Charlie's head with a rock.

"Close in on 'em fast but gentle," I radioed the guards.

The native dragged Baxter's limp body through a nearby thicket and into a small clearing. Abruptly I saw they were up against the base of the nearest mountain. A bubbling, dancing stream twisted through brown and green rock and disappeared into a ridge of gray slate. It reappeared below the hill, steaming, obviously passing through an underground hot springs.

The alien had Charlie where he wanted him before we could move. He lashed him securely with stringy vine and, with him thrown over his shoulder, ran up the slate, which rumbled down ominously behind them. He tossed Charlie over a wide hole at the top of the ridge. Slate rained down into the hole. If the Prone hadn't snapped awake and made his body rigid, he would have tumbled into the hole at that moment.

"So you wake, Familyman," the native said. "How could you admit to being anything so immoral when you were alone? You surely did not think you could eat me without help from the others of your evil brothers!"

Charlie licked his lips and

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moved his eyes; that was about all he dared move. "You — don't approve of families?"

The native drew himself up to his full elongated height in the screen. "Like all good People, I was properly abandoned at birth and I proudly say I have never associated with others except for Mating and Trading."

I noticed abstractly that he finished moving his lips long before the translation was finished. He was using a very primitive language. I screwed the button nervously in my ear for Charterson and Von Elderman to report.

THE alien looked at the rigid form of Baxter over the pit. "I suppose I should have some pity for you. You began your filthy practice too young to know better. But imagine! Combining with others of your kind to survive — at the expense of decent individuals like myself. Robbing us, eating us. The Finger of Fire will come soon and will destroy you. I have heard Familymen often try to aid one another. Perhaps others of your kind will die with you!"

He was gone long before the translation was finished, leaving Charlie Baxter arched across a pit that widened as the alien's descent disturbed more of the soft shale.

The native was out of sight. I realized his tribe would soon be extinct. The racial mind for the whole species seemed obsessed with survival by natural selection, but his tribe had gone off on the tangent of individualism, which was fine to some extent, but the Service had learned that a race couldn't survive without *some* degree of cooperation and this one's level of mating and trading did not seem sufficient.

"Captain Jackson!" Von Elderman's voice said in my ear. "We can't reach him! If we start up that hill, the soft shale is bound to shift and drop him right into that hole."

"I'll send Bronoski with a personal flyer immediately to make an air pickup," I said numbly.

It wasn't the guards' fault. Charlie hadn't seemed to be in any immediate danger and we don't kill intelligent life-forms without damned good reason — the kind of reason that stands up in court. But he was now stretched over what I was fairly certain was an active geyser — "The finger of fire," the native had called it, and had assured Charlie that it would kill him.

I dispatched Bronoski, but that was all I could do. I did not know when the geyser would spout. Maybe Bronoski would make it. Maybe he wouldn't.

I magnified the view from the useless little Bird and studied

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Charlie's face in the screen. If he lay there doing nothing, waiting for a miracle to happen, he was — I shuddered — cooked. He had to make an active decision.

If he didn't, he was almost sure to die.

But maybe that was what he wanted. Maybe accident prones really want to destroy themselves.

It was his bid.

Slate dropped off the rim of the hole into the pit and Charlie stiffened. More passive acceptance. But maybe I wasn't being fair. There wasn't much Charlie could do. There wasn't much else for him to do except give up.

But I noticed his eyes moving. They went up to the bubbling ribbon of water and down to the steaming stream below the ridge where it emerged. Charlie smiled. He had made a decision.

He folded his knees and dropped into the hole.

He had naturally made the wrong decision. Bronoski in the flying platform swung into position above the pit.

CHARLIE must have figured that he would be washed on through the hot springs and out into the shallow water below. He would be, but he would be boiled alive.

Only there are mistakes and mistakes, and sometimes mistakes aren't mistakes at all.

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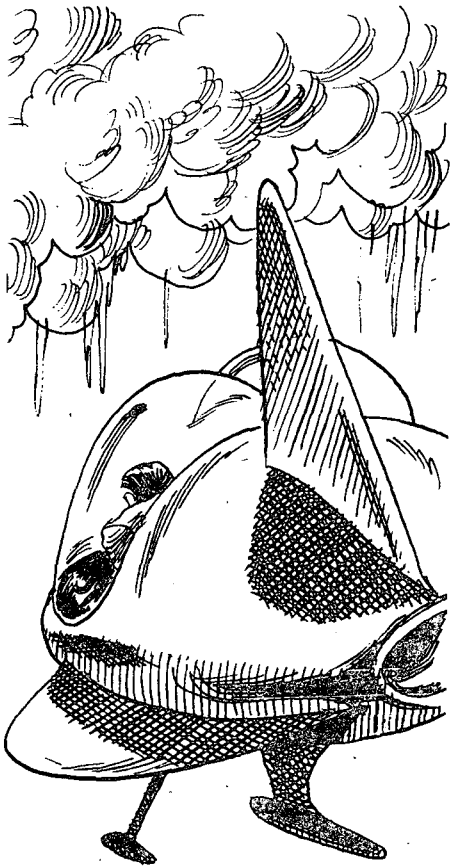

The geyser exploded, higher, faster and harder than it ever had before. And Charlie, half-drowned and half-or-more scalded, popped up and landed in the brush twenty feet away.

Bronoski fought for control of his flyer and finally made a fast pickup.

Doc Selby did a pretty good job with the First Aid Kit. Charlie's neck and collarbone were broken and over fifty per cent of his skin had to be replaced. Still, it was lucky Charlie had that concentrated soap in his pack. Ever been to Earth National Park and seen Old Faithful? You know what happened — they use soap to get the geyser spouting when it's off schedule.

We haven't told Charlie that it was anything but an accident that Bronoski was so handy. And we let him tell us about the changed customs of the natives. He resumed his regular position of Accident Prone when he saw realistically that he would inevitably be doing the same work and that he might as well get paid for it.

I often wonder if it was a genuine mistake the way he dropped into the geyser. Certainly he would have died if it hadn't been for the soap concentrates. If he took that into consideration, though, it wasn't a mistake at all, but a wise choice.

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A few days ago, when he was leaving my office — that is, the bridge — I saw Charlie slip and start to fall. He didn't give up and go limp. He gave his old dance of struggling to regain his balance. *Only this time he made it!*

I began sweating again.

After all the time, effort and money the Service puts into acquiring and training a Prone, I wonder if it is possible for one to beat his problem and cease to be an Accident Prone or even an accident prone.

This afternoon, I passed Charlie Baxter's swimming pool and saw him poised on his diving board. I waved and rather jauntily extended his grandfather's wish for good luck: "Break a leg."

Charlie grinned back at me. "Yes, sir."

But he didn't.

It would be very reassuring if he would.

— JIM HARMON

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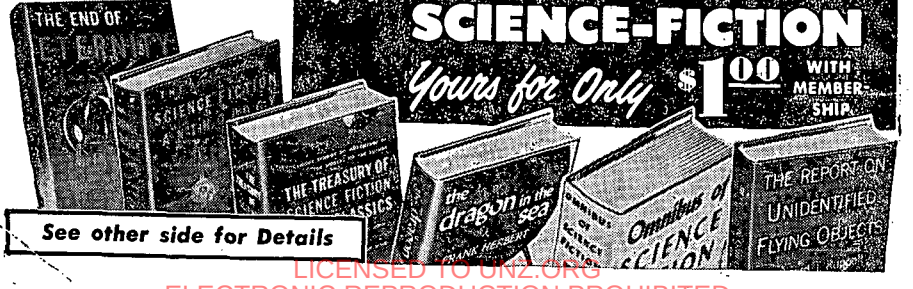
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